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A Novel of Abraham Lincoln

BY

HONORÉ WILLSIE MORROW

1927

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CHAPTER I

THE PLOT AGAINST THE LINCOLNS

AFTER the inaugural ceremonies which inducted Lincoln into office, that fine noon of March, 1861, the Lincoln family moved from Willard's Hotel to the White House.

The removal was watched by a crowd consumed with more than even the usual vast curiosity displayed over the movements of a new Chief Executive. And the crowd contained many persons who, normally, would have considered such inquisitiveness beneath their dignity. Such a person was the hostess at a small dinner party given that evening in a house on Ninth Street, near F.

It was an attractive house to the guests who crossed the tiny Georgian portico and flagged hall leading to a back parlor, which was small but handsomely furnished. A soft coal fire burned in the English grate. The marble mantel held a beautiful collection of Dresden figures, shepherds and shepherdesses, herding their fairy sheep toward a white marble clock in a glass cover. The Chippendale furniture; the gray and green Brussels carpet, with its design of morning glories; the tidies, knitted in intricate designs of birds, that hung over each chair back; the hassocks with hand-embroidered covers; the green velvet window draperies, formed a quite perfect background for the young hostess, standing before the fire.

She was very tall, nearly six feet, and about twenty-eight years of age,—tall and handsome,—with chestnut curls hanging over her ears, and violet eyes of unforgettable depth and luster. She wore a green silk gown over an enormous crinoline. It was cut very low, displaying a splendid whiteness of bust and arms. She opened and closed a tiny sandalwood fan as she talked.

Dinner was over, and the trio composing the party had returned to the parlor before beginning the conversation that brought in the crowd around Willard's.

"I yielded to my curiosity," she said, "and joined the evil-smelling mob before Willard's to catch a glimpse of the new Queen, and the young royalties."

"Not so evil-smelling, either, as you insinuate, my dear," smiled the man who stood beside the center table, thoughtfully twirling his half-filled liqueur glass. He was tall, taller than the young woman, lean and blond, with a smooth-shaven, aquiline face. "I was there myself, and I saw Mr. Russell, the correspondent of the London *Times,* and Thurlow Weed, and Mrs. Eames, and Mrs. Greenhow."

"There were any number of Southern women, Tom!" exclaimed Miss Ford. "I suppose Mrs. Greenhow went hoping to see the Queen assassinated."

The third member of the party spoke. He was old enough to have been the father of the other two, a gray-bearded man, in evening clothes that added to the extraordinary dignity of his bearing. He bowed to the hostess.

"Miss Ford, pardon, I beg of you, the presumption of a gray head, but will you not be seated, so that I may yield to the temptation offered by this arm chair? I am very tired."

"Oh, how thoughtless I am, my dear Judge!" cried Miss Ford, sinking to the ottoman beside the table, and leaning one arm on the polished mahogany surface, where the lamplight gleamed on her flawless skin. "You must be tired, indeed, after your long trip."

The Judge sank into the arm chair. "Part of my weariness was due to my standing in this same vulgar crowd for a look at Mrs. Lincoln," he said with a sigh. "It is a more astute face than gossip had led me to suspect. The woman is not a fool, even if she is ill-bred."

"A common sort of a shrew, I reckon she is." Miss Ford spoke thoughtfully. "She has complete control of Lincoln. What a monstrosity that man is!"

"Fittingly so, Lady!" exclaimed Taylor who still stood with his liqueur glass. "Seward ought to put him to chopping wood for the Cabinet fireplace. From all I can gather, it's his chief qualification for his position."

"Seward plans to do just about that, I fancy," said the judge. "Mrs. Lincoln is a Kentuckian, I hear, and a pro-slavery sympathizer. Also she is socially ambitious, and utterly ignorant of the most ordinary social usages."

"Then, if she has complete control of Lincoln,—" Miss Ford paused. "Judge Campbell," she began again, abruptly, "what is it you want of me? What can I do? There must be something portentous afoot, or you would not have spared me all this time, old friend though you are."

"I come to you from a friend of equally long standing." The judge leaned forward and looked at her, keenly. "I come to you from the President of the Confederacy, Jefferson Davis. He asks for your help. He believes you will not deny it to him."

"He is my father's dearest friend!" exclaimed Miss Ford. "It will be difficult for me to deny him anything."

"Close the door, Tom," directed Justice Campbell. "I am about to give you two the full confidence of the Confederacy. Sit down beside Miss Ford, I pray, Tom. Your restlessness is disconcerting." He paused, fitted his finger tips carefully together, gazed at them a long moment, then said:

"The provisional government of the Confederacy desires to avoid war. It is eager to establish the Confederacy by negotiation with Congress, if possible. To that end, three commissioners have been sent by President Davis to Washington for the purpose of feeling out the temper of the Lincoln Administration. I am one of those commissioners. We are working with as much secrecy as possible."

Taylor spoke suddenly. "Sir, have you talked with the hot heads in Richmond and Charleston? You can't have, or you'd realize that they are already on a war basis there. Why, Governor Pickens of South Carolina is urging Beauregard to attack Fort Sumter, *now*."

The justice raised his hand. "I know! I know! But that is not the South at its best. We want no war. We want peaceable secession, not a military dictatorship. Now, as I understand the situation, William Seward, the new Secretary of State, is the actual head of the Administration. He also declares for peace. But what Lincoln wants, we do not know. If, as gossip has it, he is under the control of Seward and his own wife, our problem is with them, not with the President."

"Not altogether," interrupted Miss Ford. "If Lincoln is as weak as that, what will prevent Charles Sumner and the Abolitionists from getting control of him, or what will prevent the commissioners from using him?"

"Exactly!" agreed Campbell. "You have come to the point with your usual perspicacity, Miss Ford. Lincoln will belong to the party first on the ground, to the party that keeps its representatives closest to him. Properly manipulated, he can be enormously useful in obtaining official recognition of the Confederacy."

"The manipulation must be extremely agile," Taylor smiled, "to get action before Sumter is taken."

"What if Fort Sumter is taken, sir?" asked Justice Campbell, somewhat irascibly. "The North did not take action when seven States were taken by the Confederacy. Why should one fort cause even a ripple in its complacency?"

"Abe Lincoln said in his inaugural address this noon," replied Taylor, "that he proposed to hang on to what Buchanan had left him. If he meant it, he might feel peevish over the loss of Fort Sumter and Charleston harbor."

"Don't you know any one who really understands that great, shambling simpleton?" cried Miss Ford. "Everybody knows Seward wrote the inaugural speech, and Seward is a political weathercock."

"No one seems to know Lincoln," replied Justice Campbell, "that is, no one in public life. But, unless I misread the astute look on Mrs. Lincoln's face, she knows her husband. And thus we arrive at the point, Miss Ford, where you can help."

"I?" asked the young woman, her face kindling. "But why and how, *I?*"

"Yours was the first name mentioned by President Davis," said Campbell, "and after three hours of discussion of many names, it was you to whom he returned. Your long social experience, your tact, your high degree of intelligence, but above all, his knowledge of the intense devotion of your father and yourself to the cause of slavery; these were the qualities the President named again and again. It is known—pardon my seeming bad taste—it is known in Washington and New York that your father has lost a great deal of money in the present financial crisis."

Miss Ford smiled. "We still are able to exist. But father is spending his time on the plantation, and we are going to close this house."

"Good!" cried the judge. "Dear Miss Ford, let it seep out that you are in such financial straits that you must seek pecuniary aid. Find some one who can recommend you to the Lincolns, then proceed to procure a position as Mrs. Lincoln's social companion, or as governess to the two young boys—then teach us how to handle Abe Lincoln."

Miss Ford had flushed a deep red. "You ask a Ford of Virginia to earn her living?"

"Worse than that," replied Justice Campbell with deep earnestness, "I ask you to earn it in a family that, both socially and politically, must be abhorrent to you, or to any other lady of the South. Miss Ford, on the character of this backwoodsman, this rail splitter, rests the future of the Confederacy. We *must know* him. If you can make us know him, you will accomplish a task not second in importance to any that can be done for our sacred institutions."

"A spy!" exclaimed the Virginian, lifting her chin. "Me, a spy."

"Lady," Taylor leaned toward her, anxiously, his blond skin pale with intensity of feeling, "Lady, don't do this thing, I beg of you!"

"What do you mean, sir?" exclaimed Campbell. "Are you treasonable to our cause?"

"No, Judge Campbell," replied Taylor, "but Miss Ford and I grew up on adjacent plantations. She represents all the loveliness, all the splendor of ladyhood to me. I cannot bear the thought—"

"Sir!" thundered Campbell, "had this been the moment to think of personal honor, would I have stooped to use the prestige of my high office in the Federal courts to further the cause of Secession? I, sir, have such loyalty to our social institutions and rights—"

"Just a moment, Judge," interrupted Miss Ford, "I'm afraid I'm a little cold blooded. If I go into this thing, I shall do so for just one reason. I believe that the institution of slavery is seriously menaced. I want to keep my slaves, and all that slavery gives to the South. If I undertake this dreadful work, I shall do so with no illusion of splendor connected with it, and I'd admire you and Mr. Davis, and all the others of you whom I know so well, if you'd be equally candid."

Taylor laughed. "She has us there, Mr. Justice!"

"Do you mean, Miss Ford," asked Campbell, ignoring Taylor's thrust, "that you will undertake the work?"

The Virginian rose, and paced splendidly in sweeping crinoline up and down the room, finally coming to pause beside the fire which she eyed thoughtfully, for some moments.

"Either you are very wise," she said at last, "in choosing so conspicuous a type as mine for this work, or else you are dangerously foolish. Hoping that you are the former, I'll agree to undertake it for just two months."

Campbell rose and solemnly shook hands with her. Then he turned to the younger man.

"Mr. Taylor, Mr. Davis asked me, in case Miss Ford agreed to this great sacrifice, to invite you to undertake to act as direct messenger between himself and this lady."

Taylor's pale face blazed. But before he could reply, Miss Ford put her hand on his arm. "Think, Tom dear!"

He stared at her, his eyes softening. "Do you want me, Lady?"

"I want you, I need you. Two months are nothing, considering the tremendous stakes."

"I'll help, with one understanding," ejaculated Taylor. "When war is declared, I want a commission."

"You shall have it." Justice Campbell held out his hand. "Your grateful country will one day thank you both. Now, then, let us work out some details."

An hour later, Justice Campbell left the little house on Ninth Street, and Miss Ford and Taylor, after seeing him to the door, returned to the fire in the back parlor.

"Do you care to take a look in at the Inaugural Ball, Lady?" asked Taylor.

She gave him a glance half scornful, half humorous. "Don't force me to meet the wild animals till the new business requires it, Tom. When do you start for—what is Judge Campbell's phrase?—'The provisional capital at Montgomery, and his Excellency, the President of the Confederacy'?"

"To-morrow or the next day," replied Taylor, smiling at Miss Ford's mimicry of Justice Campbell, but sobering quickly, as he said, "I can't help feeling a little tragic about it, Lady. After all, our ancestors did as much about establishing the Federal government as did the most ardent of these Northerners—"

Miss Ford tossed her fine head. "I have no sentimentality about governments, I can tell you, Tom. I've lived too close to Washington all my life. There's nothing high or fine about governing. It's all intrigue, crookedness, selfish grabbing—with the lowest types of minds succeeding best. My political litany is very simple: I believe in slavery because I think it produces the finest type of white civilization. I wish to keep my slaves because they make it possible for me to live beautifully. I shall be fiercely loyal to Jefferson Davis and his crowd because they are fighting the slavery fight."

"You always have seen life without shadings of meaning," mused Taylor. "I suppose it's that decisiveness that makes your nature so irresistibly attractive to my everlasting quibbling over motives.—Will your father fall in with the idea of buying the tavern at Fairfax Courthouse?"

"With Davis crowd supplying the money? Why not, my dear Tom?" drawled Miss Ford. "Who is this man Moseby who will head the information bureau, there?"

"I don't know him," replied Tom, "except by reputation. A very clever fellow, I've been told. Where are you going, Lady?" as she rose and moved toward the door.

"Both you and I are going to drop in on Mrs. Eames. She'll be sure to have a crowd there, this evening, all of them gossiping about the Lincolns. I want to hear what I can, and if Charles Sumner is there, make him some casual suggestions."

A few moments later, the two Virginians were on the way to the Eames home, one of the social centers of Washington.

March, in the city of Washington, can be as genial as April in Chicago, and the windows of Lincoln's bedroom, looking south to the Potomac were open to a soft wind that smelled, not too unpleasantly, of the flats and marshes that lay between the White House grounds and the river.

The bedroom, in the southwest corner of the Executive Mansion, was handsomely furnished with a great mahogany bedstead, with bureaus, tables, and chairs of rosewood, and with a thick-piled red carpet, somewhat worn, as were the heavy red hangings and the upholstering; but they were not the less pleasant and ease-inviting, for that.

The gas had been turned low in the jet beside the bureau, and Mr. Lincoln, in a faded blue dressing gown, walked slowly toward the arm chair that stood by one of the windows. Even the dressing gown could not conceal much of his fine length of six feet, four inches, nor could it soften his stoop, or the disproportionately great length of arms and legs, of hands and feet; nor did it conceal the fact that he was thin through the chest, from front to back, and narrow across the shoulders. What it did conceal, however, was the fact that his excessive thinness,—he weighed but a hundred and sixty pounds,—did not make a weak man of him. He was all steel muscle and sinew, a man of astounding physical strength and endurance.

He dropped into the arm chair, put his feet upon the window ledge and leaned his head against the cushioned back of the chair. Seen in profile, his head was unusually high above his ears,—those outstanding ears that *Punch* and *Harper's* and *Leslie's Weekly* so delighted to accent for the amused and contemptuous public! Seen from the front, the forehead, the dome of the head, covered by thick black hair, was magnificent, as was the architecture of the eye socket and the bold firmness of the nose and the granite chin.

Those who knew him best, as for example his secretary, John Hay, insisted that Lincoln was not ugly, but homely,—to an American, a subtle, and vastly significant distinction. Those who knew him least, as for example, the correspondent of the London *Times*, spoke of Lincoln's awkward height, his too prominent ears, his shambling gait, his huge feet and hands, of his too large mouth and too heavy lower lip; and he spoke of the striking beauty of his gray eyes, full, deep, penetrating and ineffably tender; and ended by saying that Lincoln's was a face of infinite sagacity, his personality such that something quite other than his physical peculiarities would make it impossible for the most indifferent observer to pass him in the street without notice.

Lincoln watched the far starlit gleam of the river, without actually seeing it. He was grave, but not sad. The day had gone better than he had dared hope. Not that he had shared the general fear among his supporters, that he would be assassinated during the inaugural ceremonies. All General Scott's precautions,—the heavily guarded barouche, the sharpshooters stationed on the roofs along Pennsylvania Avenue, the soldiers with cocked guns at the Capitol,—had amused and irked him.

"Nothing on earth, I reckon, can keep a man from shooting me," he had told his wife that morning, "if he really has set his tooth for it. Besides, it's not common sense to fence me in with guns all day, then turn me loose at a public ball at night."

No, his apprehensions had not been for his own safety. They had been lest the South would choose to embarrass him by some act of such sinister fury, that the "irrepressible conflict" would be precipitated before he could be installed in the White House. The North was not ready for war, could not be until it had found its master. That, as Lincoln saw it, was his task,—to focus all the quarreling or indifferent forces of the North on one purpose,—that of saving the Union.

There was a murmur of voices in the next room,—Mary and her sisters putting on the finishing touches for the Inaugural Ball. Mary, he told himself, was happy at last. Thank God for that! She had earned happiness. A child's voice now, in staccato exclamations,—Taddie asking for something. Bobbie, the oldest boy, had gone back to Harvard an hour before, glad, he said, as his father recalled with a chuckle, to be snubbed in Cambridge, after the sickening licking of his boots in Springfield and Washington.

The door between the two rooms suddenly swung open, admitting a burst of light, eight-year-old Taddie, and a violent smell of Florida water. The boy, resplendent in a purple velvet suit, flung himself upon his father's great knees.

"Papa day! Papa day! Can't I go to the pa'ty? Willie's going and I didn't fight when motha made me get into this nasty suit! I've got myself all pe'fumed up fo' it."

"You smell like Al Herbert's barber shop on a Saturday night," said Lincoln, kissing the child's quivering lips several times. Taddie was the baby of the family, and appeared even younger than his years, because of the impediment in his speech that blurred all his R's.

"Who says you can't go, precious Tadpole, after getting rigged out in these ice cream clothes?"

"Motha said so. I told he' I'd as soon die as not go and I would. That ball will be betta' than fo'ty ci'cuses! Old Edwa'd, the doo' man told me so. I'll die if I can't go, Papa day!"

The child's blue eyes were turned up to his father's gray ones in an agony of pleading. Every nerve in his little body was tense with excitement. His father patted the velvet shoulder and turned toward the open door.

"Mary! O Mary! Can you come here a moment?"

"Sorry but I can't, Abra'm," returned a clear voice. "It's a critical moment."

"Then warn the girls that two men are coming in!" called Lincoln, putting Tad down and rising. There was a muffled shriek and the sound of fleeing feet, as father and son appeared in Mrs. Lincoln's room.

Mary Lincoln stood before the pier glass that was set into the door of the wardrobe, and, for a long moment, Lincoln paused, staring at her, heedless of Tad's impatient jerking at his hand. Mary always had been pretty, but now she seemed to him to be actually beautiful. She was of a little less than medium height, inclined to plumpness, with a wonderful fair skin, and masses of brown hair, braided about a well-shaped head. Her forehead was full and high, her eyes large, blue, set well apart under straight, fine brows. Her eyes, Lincoln said, were the kindest in the world. Her nose was straight and a little long, her lips were too thin for beauty, but sensitive and wistful in expression. Her skin and her round, full throat were lovely.

It was a face of penetrating intelligence.

Lincoln drew a long breath of admiration, partly for the new dress, partly for the glow in Mary's vivid face. She wore white satin, over an enormous crinoline. Lincoln hated crinolines, but he thought the lace that draped the skirt and bodice was exquisite, and that the pearl necklace and bracelets were iridescent as dewdrops on her fair skin. Twining a wreath of jessamine and violets in her hair, she smiled at him in the mirror, then frowned.

"You ought to be dressed, Abra'm!"

"All set, but my jacket, wife! Why not let Taddie go, as long as Willie's going?"

"He ought to be in bed this minute," replied Mary. "It's after ten o'clock and he's worn out with excitement. He's been half hysterical, all day. He hasn't Willie's calm temper, and he'll be down with a bilious attack, next!"

Lincoln looked down at the small boy whose scowl so ludicrously duplicated his mother's. He was a very pretty child, and his father doted on his cherub-like features. "Meaning," smiled Lincoln, "that Tad's your mental legatee and Willie's mine!"

"No," returned Mary, trying the effect of the wreath with head turning now this way, and now that. "I don't mean so at all. Taddie has your soft heart and my nerves, and a smaller replica of your brain. Willie has my hard heart, your nerves, and more than my brain."

Her blue eyes twinkled. Lincoln gave a low chuckle in response, and then said, earnestly, "Please let Taddie go! He'll be as calm as Willie. Can't you promise that, son?"

"Yes, Motha, yes! Yes! Yes! Yes!" shrieked Tad.

"There, you see?" exclaimed his mother, turning round to look disapprovingly, first at her husband, then at her young son. "No! You must go to bed, Tad."

With a scream as of mortal pain, Tad threw himself on the floor. Lincoln picked him up, kissed him, then said in a voice of unmistakable firmness, "One more scream like that, young man, and I'll put you to bed myself."

Tad instantly became silent. His father crossed the room, and standing before Mary, his hands in his dressing gown pockets, looked down at her without smiling, as he said, gently,

"If I beguile you into believing how handsome I think you're looking, will you let the boy go?"

"Oh, that's not fair, Abra'm! No! No! No! He mustn't go."

"I'll go his security for good behavior. Better let him go, Mary!"

"No! No!" repeated Mary with more emphasis than the case would seem to warrant, to one who did not know how badly Lincoln spoiled his children.

"I reckon he'll have to go, Mary," said Lincoln, still gently.

She looked up into the deep-set, gray eyes. Back of their tenderness she saw the granite, and a look of helplessness came into her face. It was all too familiar an experience for both husband and wife, and Mary had not the gift of patience, persistent as she was. She knew only too well, however, when she was worsted.

"Have your own way, Abra'm," she said, sadly, and turned back to her toilet. "Taddie, go wash your face and find Willie."

With a whoop of joy, the child flew from the room.

Lincoln took an eager stride that carried him between his wife and the mirror. He caught her fingers in his big, warm palms.

"Now, I've offended you again! But he wants things so that it actually gripes him, just like I did when I was little, and I never had them. That's why I interfere. You don't know what that kind of punishment is, Mary."

"Don't I?" Mary looked up and Lincoln saw the look in her blue gaze that never failed to fill him with contrition. He realized, whenever he had time to think about it, that he neglected Mary in many little ways. He put a great hand on either side of her face and stooped toward her, but she moved back from him.

"You're putting the boys in the way of losing their hunger for anything, Abra'm. You are satiating them now, and later, when life has no zest for them, they'll blame you."

Lincoln nodded. "My head's in perfect accord with your statement, my dear, but my heart isn't." His beautiful white teeth flashed in a whimsical smile.

"If only you could learn to say 'No'!" sighed his wife.

"It's an awful weakness," groaned Lincoln, then with his irresistible twinkle, "I've often wondered what would have become of me if I'd been a girl. With this incapacity for saying 'No,' nothing but my ugliness could have saved my virtue! That's why the Almighty made me a man, I'm sure!"

Mary burst into helpless laughter, suddenly kissed one of the great hands that lay on her shoulders, and gave him a little push. "Go along, you great child, and put on your proper coat! And *please* don't forget the white gloves! They're in your little upper bureau drawer."

Lincoln's shout of laughter ended in a comical groan. He kissed Mary, very tenderly, and slowly returned to his own room. There, he turned up the gas, pulled off the dressing gown, and put on the black broadcloth frock coat that lay on the bed. It had been made for him by an excellent New York tailor, and he scrutinized his reflection in the mirror with whimsical satisfaction. He was searching in the wrong drawer for his gloves when a knock sounded at the outer door.

"Come in! Come in!" shouted Lincoln.

A young man entered. He was of medium height, and did not look his twenty-two years, in spite of a small, black mustache. His face was as round as Tad's, with blunt features and high color. His eyes were a brilliant black, beneath heavy brows that lifted at their outer edges, giving him a perpetually quizzical expression that was very attractive. He wore impeccable broadcloth evening clothes. This was John Hay, assistant to the President's private secretary, George Nicolay.

"What's the trouble, John? House on fire?" asked Lincoln.

"In a way, yes, Mr. Lincoln," answered young Hay. "Nicolay thought you ought to have this letter, at once. It's from the Acting Secretary of War."

"Is it more important to these United States than my getting into white gloves?" asked the President, continuing his search in the bottom bureau drawer.

"I think so. Major Anderson sent word from Fort Sumter to-day," replied Hay, his eyes snapping with excitement, "that his food supplies won't last much longer, and that he must be reënforced, or the fort evacuated, within the next month. The Acting Secretary thought you ought to have this information in case anything came up, to-night."

Lincoln ceased his search for his gloves. "Hand over the note, John."

Very deliberately he put on his spectacles, read the missive through, folded it, and put it into his hip pocket.

"John, what do you think of my new clothes? My wife says this is the first time she's ever got me into a decent fitting suit."

"They look very well, sir. But," his cheeks flushing, "do you get the significance of that letter, Mr. President? If we reënforce Sumter, the South will take it as an excuse for precipitating a fight. If we don't reënforce, our only toe-hold on Charleston is gone."

"I might get the significance," said Lincoln mildly, "frontier town politician though the newspapers say I am! As I recall, there was considerable discussion of Fort Sumter even back Springfield way, John."

"I beg your pardon, sir!" exclaimed Hay.

"That's all right!" smiled Lincoln. "Nobody knows better than I that I can stand a heap of educating. My wife has been currying me for twenty years, haven't you, Mary?" as Mrs. Lincoln swept into the room, closely followed by Tad and Willie.

Mary smiled and turned to young Hay. "How well your evening clothes become you, John! No wonder the girls buzz round you so!"

The young secretary made a profound obeisance. "But no one will look at me if I stand near you, Madam President! You are regal to-night! What a wonderful dress!"

"It's thirty steps around the bottom of the skirt," said Willie solemnly. He was a slender boy of eleven, with a strong resemblance to his father.

The three grown people laughed, and under cover of this, John Hay bowed himself out of the room.

"I like that boy!" said Mary Lincoln. "He's a little highty-tighty now, with excitement and his elevation to grandeur, but he has a brain. After he understands you, he'll in many ways be more valuable to you than Nicolay."

"Socially, perhaps," agreed the President. "But for steady chewing of the cud of hard detail, thank heaven for George Nicolay. Mary, where did you put those gloves? Have I got to wear them?"

"You most certainly must!" snapped his wife. She sailed like a full-rigged vessel across the great room, took the gloves from the drawer, and with the boys beside her, watched the President, sternly, while he worked his great hands into the white kids.

The clock on the mantel ticked loudly for many minutes, during the process. Tick! Tock! Tick! Tock!—Lincoln's mind took a long stride. Food supplies running low,—whose carelessness, or worse, was that?

What had old General Scott been thinking and doing? A fine soldier, the General-in-Chief of the army, but weakened now by senility, and an interest in politics. The old man must ease himself into retirement. Then whom could Lincoln get adequately to head up the pitiful excuse for an army? All the months since his nomination, Lincoln had been gathering information about the Federal military resources, and sweating blood over Buchanan's inadequacy. Who would head up the army until he knew enough to head it up, himself— Tick! Tock! Tick! Tock!

"Papa day!" plaintively from Taddie. "The hack has been waiting fo' us, fo' a long time."

"You mean the carriage, Taddie," corrected his mother.

"It's a hack, just like we'd go to the depot in, in Sp'ingfield," insisted Taddie.

"If you rush papa, he'll tear his gloves," said Willie, breathing hard in sympathy with his father's struggles.

"Almost done, boys!" exclaimed Lincoln. "Here, fasten this button, Willie, and then both hands will be jailed for the evening."

With a chuckle, Willie complied, and Lincoln offered his arm to his wife. But to the boys' great delight, although he made a valiant effort, the President could not pass through the broad doorway, beside the crinoline, and was obliged to follow at a respectful distance. So, in a gale of laughter, the family set off for the Inaugural Ball.

Outwardly, the ball was only a larger edition of the many political functions the Lincolns had attended, or had staged, themselves, in Illinois. But Lincoln knew that the crowd was not made up of folk from all sections of the country, as it normally should have been. The South was absent. Social Washington, which prided itself on belonging to the Southern aristocracy, was absent.

And the President, shaking hand after hand, was never for a moment unconscious of the fact that, while the Marine Band boomed and shrilled quadrille, waltz, and polka, the nation was sick, and that it was like dancing in the parlor while one's mother fought for life in the room adjacent.

Hand after hand in his own, he watched the faces keenly, towering above the crowd, bending his head now and again to say a special word to one who would pause for special greeting, listening to Marshal Lamon's never-ending comments on the personages filing by, and never for a moment ceasing to hear the choking struggle for existence in the room adjacent.

As the hours wore on, the noisy gayety about him grew increasingly distasteful to him, and he was casting about in his mind for an excuse to go home, when, about one o'clock, a small hand caught Lincoln's left thumb, and he looked down into Willie's solemn gray eyes. "Papa, Taddie's pretty sick in there behind that bank of ferns. I found a kind-looking man standing alone in a corner, and got him to hold Tad while I got you."

"Jings!" exclaimed his father. "Your mother was right as usual! Go find your aunts or your Uncle Todd. I'm busy."

"They're all dancing. Besides Taddie says he'll yell if anybody but you comes for him. If you'll come round through the passage behind you, there won't many folks notice you."

Lincoln glanced about him. His mentor, Marshal Lamon, was giving his attention, for the moment, to a tall, handsome woman, with three great ostrich plumes protruding from the top of her head.

"Lead quickly, son," said Lincoln.

A moment later he was stooping over Taddie, who was reclining across the knees of a rubicund gentleman in immaculate evening attire. The President lifted the child, holding him easily across his chest with one great arm.

"He'll do now, I think, Mr. President," said the gentleman.

"All my fault!" exclaimed Lincoln. "I always was, and will be, the prize fool! You've moved into a warm place in my heart, sir, without needing to knock at the door."

"I hope I may not be moved out, Mr. President," returned the rubicund gentleman, with something earnest in his smile, and scrutinizing Lincoln closely, as he spoke. "You and I may have need of a firm sympathy with each other, sir. I am William Russell of the London *Times*."

"I know the London *Times*," said Lincoln. "I suspect it's one of the greatest powers in the world. In fact, I don't know of a greater, except, perhaps, the Mississippi. Come and see me, Mr. Russell."

"Thank you, Mr. President, I will," returned the Englishman, gravely.

Taddie opened his eyes. "You'd betta get me home befo' I'm sick again," he said in a warning tone.

Lincoln shook Russell's hand, both men laughing, then fled into the passage-way, where he met the outraged Lamon, who growled, savagely:

"Look here, Lincoln, there's no call for you to play nurse, at this particular moment. I want to tell you—"

"It's no time now for a report from the sub-committee," interrupted Lincoln, coolly. "Get our hack, Hill, and call my wife. I'm taking Tad home."

The Marshal groaned, but strode off as he was bidden.

With unusual self-control, Mary said nothing on the ride home, regarding Tad's share in cutting the party short, but after both boys were in bed, in the rooms across the hall from their parents, she came into her husband's room to brush her hair. Lincoln, once more in the blue dressing gown, was slowly pacing the floor.

Mary in a long, pink flannel boudoir sacque took a vehement stroke at her shining brown locks.

"Abra'm, I've held off for an hour, but I'm going to tell you now that this thing can't be repeated. You must promise to let me control the boys' doings, or they'll not only make our lives miserable, but they'll be known as public nuisances. It was bad enough in Springfield, but, after all, every one there knew us and the children, and, I hope, made allowances. Here, misbehavior on their part will raise more enemies for you than you're willing to believe. You must make up your mind to say 'No!' Good heavens, are you going to be as weak as this with that ravening horde of office seekers? I can't understand how a man of your really remarkable judgment of human beings can be so spineless in his actions toward them."

Lincoln watched the brush following the bright waves of hair. That horde of office seekers! All week, they had packed the corridors of Willard's Hotel. They pursued him like the creatures of a nightmare. Tomorrow, they would descend upon the White House. Nicolay would help. There was a man, young as he was, who could say "no," so that even a job seeker understood it. Yes, Nicolay must take the initial shock tomorrow, while he extracted what he could from old General Scott.

"Abra'm!" cried Mary. "You aren't listening to me at all! Stop pacing the floor, and give me an answer."

Lincoln paused before her. "My dear Mary, what answer is there to give? I know my shortcomings as well as you do. I'll husk out the office-seeking job somehow, I reckon. As for the boys,—Mary, if my life depended on it, I couldn't deny them a pleasure it was possible for me to give them. We've worried the thing over between us a hundred times. It's no use. I know my limits."

No one knew better than Mary that it was no use, and, having given vent to her irritation, she sighed and acknowledged defeat by saying, with an air of general interest:

"No, you have no illusions about yourself or any one else. You are a man without illusions. There lies the basis of your great strength."

"And weakness," added Lincoln.

Mary nodded, and neither spoke, while she finished brushing and braiding the long, beautiful strands. When she had finished, she followed her husband in a turn up and down the room, then she brought him to pause and, looking earnestly up into his face, she said:

"I'm not going to nag you, Abra'm, one bit, if I can help it. You know how abominably quick my tongue is! I fight it as hard as you do your own loving heart. I shall leave you alone as much as I possibly can, and still take proper care of you."

Lincoln returned her look. "Don't you worry about nagging me, Mary. I need nagging. Nobody but you and I know what I owe to that same nagging of yours. They'd laugh me out of the White House if I had the manners now that I had when you married me, twenty years ago. All I want to warn you of is this: Confine your nagging to me and the household help. Let the President's help alone."

"I'll try. Good night, Abra'm. God keep you and help you."

"I guess He will, if I do my share," replied her husband, cheerfully, and as she went into her own room, he resumed his tramping from fireplace to window and back again.

CHAPTER II

THE SEARCH FOR TRUTH BEGINS

LINCOLN went down to breakfast, the next morning, at eight o'clock. He had difficulty, even at that early hour, in eluding the crowd that packed the main hall on the first floor and the public staircase. Old Daniel, the assistant doorkeeper, held the mob at bay by a rope across the stairhead. He was addressing the foremost gentlemen in a wheedling manner:

"For Gawd's sake, gentlemen, use the cuspidors! Use 'em! Polished for this very occasion." Lincoln smiled, as he fled down the hall, and closed the door of the family dining room after him.

And it looked for a time as if even this room were not safe, for three gentlemen thrust their heads through a north window, and begged in unison for post office appointments in Iowa, Vermont, and Ohio. Marshal Lamon, who was breakfasting with Lincoln, ejected them without wasting a word on them, and locked the windows as well as the door into the room.

The President made no comment, nor did he do more than nod when Lamon outlined his plans for the Presidential Levee, to be held on March 8. When he had finished his meal under Mary's eye,—he would have eaten nothing had she not kept plate and cup filled,—Lincoln went upstairs to the President's office.

He entered it slowly and glanced around, with the thought that he ought to give attention to the details of its furnishings, since so large a part of the next four years was to be spent here. He noted the marble fireplace with its brass fenders and bright wood fire, the south windows with their view of the half-finished Washington monument, protruding from the acres of rubbish, the shining Potomac, and the red hills of Virginia beyond. He noted the huge oak Cabinet table in the middle of the room, a smaller table near one of the windows, which would be his own desk, a shabby sofa on either side of the east door into the secretaries' office, maps and dull portraits on the walls. A sweeping glance gave him all this before George Nicolay, followed by young Hay and Stoddard, came forward to greet him.

William Stoddard, a friend of John Hay, was a charming, slender youth, of even more the scholar type than Hay. He was destined to have first handling of all the President's mail. Lincoln's choice of two young men of this character, Mary wrote her sister that day, was, to her, one more proof of his fine judgment of men. Lincoln put a cordial arm over Stoddard's shoulders.

"You've got a tough job, Billy,—clearing stumpage for the rest of us to plow. And it'll get worse instead of better. Think your nerve will hold?"

Stoddard blushed with pleasure, and stuttered with embarrassment and Lincoln, wearing a friendly grin that showed his even, white teeth, turned to Nicolay as to an old friend. And though Nicolay had been with Lincoln only since the beginning of his election campaign, he already had earned the standing of an old friend. He was a Hanoverian by birth, and, as Thurlow Weed said after bumping against him in Springfield, somewhat bilious of temperament,—a compliment, coming from a politician of Weed's ilk! All that a man of firm character and deep loyalty could do to stand between Lincoln's kindliness, and the politician's rapacity, George Nicolay was to do. All that a keen student of American history and politics, a fluent writer, an adept at handling detail, could give to Lincoln, through four exhausting years, he was to give.

As for externals, he looked older than his twenty-eight years. He was of middle height, with a cool, penetrating dark eye, and a short mustache and goatee that concealed a firm, not unhumorous mouth.

"Well, Nicolay," said Lincoln, "are we ready to fire the salute?"

"We are, sir," replied Nicolay with a smile. "General Scott is waiting for you in the reception room."

"Good!" The President nodded. "Stoddard, shunt the folks waiting on the stairs directly into the secretaries' office. I want you boys to do what you can to weed them out before they reach me. Give each one a fair hearing, but keep them moving."

"Shall we send them to the heads of the departments in which they want jobs?" asked Hay.

"Not at first," replied Lincoln. "The heads haven't been inducted into office yet, and anyhow, I want to get a line on the problem myself. A new party,—they look for the spoils to be tremendous. We've got to give out offices enough to keep the influential men in line. On the other hand, our problems are going to be strange enough without adding to them by crippling the regular Federal business with green hands. By the way, John, when you have a free moment, I wish you'd buy me Halleck's book on military strategy. Have it put in my bedroom. Get the money from Mrs. Lincoln."

Young Hay gave the President a bright, curious look as he answered promptly, "I will, Mr. Lincoln."

The President nodded dismissal and, striding across the room, put his head into the reception hall.

"Come in, General! Come in!"

A handsome old gentleman, smooth-shaven, save for sideburns, wearing a blue broadcloth uniform with sash and gold epaulets, greeted the President with a stiff bow, and, obviously hampered by age and great lameness, followed into the office, where both men seated themselves before the fire.

"General," asked Lincoln, without preliminaries, "Major Anderson says he's got to have bread down there at Fort Sumter. What are you going to do about it?"

The old General sat stiffly erect. "That, Mr. President, cannot be decided without much study."

"Well, I suppose you've been studying, as you say, for a good many months. Go ahead and tell me just what the conditions are in Charleston harbor! I'm a willing learner, General."

General Scott cleared his throat, and began an elaborate description of the fortification and defense of the harbor. He spoke, as was his wont, in sounding phrases, embellished with classic anecdotes.

Lincoln, sitting with his hands clasped about his left knee, listened patiently until the old man finished, and then, without changing his posture, he said: "General, there's a story out in my neck of the woods of a man whose cabin burned down, and the neighbors all contributed something to start him over again. They were so liberal that he found himself better off than he'd ever been before, and he grew proud and particular. One day, a neighbor brought him a bag of oats, but the man who'd been burned out refused it. 'No, friend!' said he, 'I'm not taking oats now. I'm taking nothing but money.' "

The General stared at the President, puzzled and half offended. "What am I to understand by that, sir? Surely this is no moment for levity!"

"Certainly it's not," agreed Lincoln, "but we each speak in our own tongue. I can't point my remarks from the classics, so I use the illustrations that're familiar to me. What I mean is this: My neighbors have put me in a position where I can demand something of real value. I want the military facts in the Fort Sumter crisis, General, not the sort of evasions you hand out to the folks under you."

The fine old soldier rose painfully, and with every aspect of outraged dignity. Before he could speak, however, Lincoln thrust him gently into his chair, and patted him on the shoulder.

"There! There, General! You mustn't take offense at me! If I promise to endure your Greek heroes, you must promise to put up with my worthies from the Sangamon. I understand your position, how you've been thwarted by the Congress in all attempts to put the army on a war basis, how you've been imposed on and harassed by politicians, and how your great talents—"

"Tut! Tut!" puffed General Scott, suddenly smiling, "all this is unnecessary! I'm a soldier and enjoy fights of every kind. I have every sympathy for your difficulties, sir. Command me!"

"Are you sure you understand what my difficulties are, General?" asked Lincoln, anxiously. "You and I must see single-eyed, for we're destined to tackle this together."

"My vision perhaps has military restrictions, sir," replied Scott.

Lincoln looked into the glowing fire, and spoke slowly: "This Government has been handed over to me, not in its original integrity, but humbled, diminished, and threatened. I'm going to restore it, but I look to exhaust all peaceful means first. I know that delay works in the interest of rebellion, but how can I threaten force until I'm in a position to use it? Our military strength is almost nothing. But that's not the worst. The North is torn by dissension, where it's not completely indifferent. Of just one thing I'm sure. I shall give up nothing that Buchanan hasn't already let slip. You must plan to reenforce Sumter, at once."

The General's reply was prompt. "To supply or reenforce the fort, sir, would require a fleet of vessels and transports that would take four months to collect, also 5000 regulars and 20,000 volunteers, which would require new acts of Congress to authorize, and from six to eight months to raise, organize, and discipline. The rebels at Charleston are in a position of enormous strength, sir."

The President jerked his head, ran his fingers through his black hair until it stood on end, then asked abruptly:

"What about Fort Pickens at Pensacola?"

"We still hold it, but it should be reënforced without delay."

"Get at that job at once," said Lincoln, "and try to work out a better plan for Fort Sumter. In the meantime, I'll send some one to Charleston to see if there's any truth in the rumor that there are many Unionists still there. Well," with his sudden smile, "I reckon I've given you a mean job of knitting, General. Something like turning the heel of the sock, eh?"

The old man, who had been eyeing the President keenly, replied with a gallant attempt to speak in the vernacular: "Many soldiers are expert knitters, sir," and rose once more.

Lincoln nodded, and putting his great arm around the General's waist, much disarranging the yellow sash, thereby, he assisted him to the door.

"Louis," he said to the waiting messenger, "go down to the General's carriage with him, then find out how Tad is this morning."

"He's fine, sir," replied Louis with a grin, as he took the old soldier gently under the arm. "He and Willie have just been fighting in the hall, and their mother had some trouble pulling Tad off his brother."

The President laughed and returned to his desk, where Nicolay was waiting with a list of persons whom he thought Lincoln ought to see.

The next few hours were like a nightmare to Lincoln, with men filing in and out of his room, at the shortest possible intervals, all of them with their demands made in terms of highest possible urgency on their part, and implying the greatest possible obligation to them on Lincoln's part. Just as he had reached the point where he felt he could endure no more, he was rescued by young Stoddard, who announced that the foreign diplomats were awaiting him in the Blue Drawing Room. He remained chatting with the diplomats for an hour, then, as the last Minister, M. Mercier of France, bowed himself out, Mary burst in from the Red Room.

"I thought they'd never leave," she groaned. "I'm trying to check over the list of necessary repairs. This house looks like a shabby hotel on the point of failure! It's absurd, this attempt to keep it on such simple lines. The President's wife must consult every morning with the darky cook, and plan all the meals for the day. I don't mind the work, but it seems as if my time ought to be more valuable. When the mob thins out of the East Room, I want you to look at the carpet in there. It has no pile left."

The President looked down at her with the same expression of amused tenderness that he gave the children, and Mary was quick to note it.

"You think I don't recognize the importance of your work? I do. But I consider the carpet in the East Room quite as much a matter for the President's attention as the post master in Soap Creek."

"I've got to understand the problem—" began Lincoln.

"Nonsense!" interrupted Mary. "You haven't the cold blood to turn them out, just as you can't tell me to stop wasting your time!"

She left abruptly, closing the door of the East Room behind her.

Lincoln rumpled his hair, then pulled the bell rope. To the colored servant who answered he said:

"What's your name, young man?"

"James, Mr. President, sir."

"Well, James, how am I to get back up to my office without the coat and breeches being pulled off me by my constituents?"

James grinned broadly, and scratched his head. "Well, Mr. President, sir, you kin work round to the help's stairs, sir, and then—and then—there you is, sir! Don't do you no good, nohow! You'd have to cross upstairs, where they're swarming thickest."

Lincoln chuckled. "Go find Marshal Lamon, and send him to me, here. Tell him I need help, and need it quick."

He turned to throw a stick of wood on the fire, then waited, motionless, his eyes on the flames, his thoughts on Fort Sumter, until Lamon's imposing figure in blue-checked trousers and fawn-colored, long-tailed coat, appeared in the doorway.

"Lamon," said the President, "I want you to get the job-hunters moved out into the yard, or somewhere. I've got so I don't feel as if I was master in my own house. You might pass the word around that I can't do anything until the members of the Cabinet take office, later in the week, and that, after they're in, I'll do as little as I can."

"That's the idea!" agreed the Marshal. "You'd better stay here while I call off all bets. They'll all be mad."

"One moment, Lamon!" Lincoln drew the Marshal near him and said in a low voice, "I've just been thinking that the hatred and rancor out there on the staircase, the greed and confusion, are typical of the whole country. Confusion worse confounded! I must understand! I must have facts! I must *know* before I act.

For instance, what's the real temper of Charleston? Look here; I'm going to send you down there to inspect the Post Office, though, by jings, you're better fitted to inspect the race tracks! And I'm going to ask my old friend Hurlbut to go down with you, to visit his sister who lives in Charleston. You'll draw the fire, as representing me, while Hurlbut gets the facts. Start as soon as you can."

"Shall I go before the levee?" asked the Marshal.

"Lamon, shall we stand shaking hands at the front door while fire rages in our cellar?"

"Right again!" ejaculated the Marshal. "I'll find Hurlbut, to-night."

Lincoln nodded. "I'm not sure what the duties of a Marshal are, are you, Lamon? Struck me, when they told me we had to have one, that he would be about as useful to me as that cane my wife made me carry at the inaugural ceremonies."

"I'd come to the conclusion about an hour ago," replied Lamon, "that I was supposed to be something like a cross between a time-keeper and a tout; and I was going off behind the woodshed for a good cry. But the thought of Charleston steadies my nerves."

"Well," chuckled the President, "you might try to earn part of your keep by helping to get me back to my office again!" He looped his arm in that of his friend and together they made the difficult journey to the upper floor.

Seward was ill for a day or so after the inauguration, but on the evening of the sixth of March he strolled into the President's office, accompanied by William Russell. Lincoln was glad to see the famous war correspondent. He had taken an instant liking to him, but, more than that, it was highly important that England obtain a just view of America's burning problem. This man, unless Lincoln's keen judgment of men was at fault, would probe to the bottom, and report only on what he actually brought to light.

"Well, sir," Lincoln patted him on the back, "you're as welcome as the first batch of buckwheat griddle cakes. Ever eat any?"

Russell smoothed his dark mustache with a manner that might have indicated a touch of embarrassment, but his voice was unperturbed.

"Never, your Excellency!"

"Come to breakfast here along next November, sir, and we'll see what my wife can do to lift your ignorance. In the meantime, draw up to the fire and tell me what England will do if war visits this unhappy country." Lincoln pulled out a chair as he spoke.

"We'll have no war, and my prophecy is that the seceding states will shortly begin to return at the rate of one a month," exclaimed Seward, as he eased his frail figure into a chair.

"There, Mr. Russell, from his own lips! And any one in these United States'll tell you that Seward knows more about the matter than I do," said Lincoln.

Russell turned from his scrutiny of the President to Seward, who made no attempt to deny Lincoln's statement. Seated, Seward was far more impressive than standing, for his marked stoop, and his careless habit of dress were thus made inconspicuous, and his finely shaped head, with his thin, smooth-shaven face, the secret, penetrating eyes, the aquiline nose and humorous mouth, were given their full value.

"The report is true, I suppose," said Russell, "that Jefferson Davis issued a call this morning for 100,000 volunteers for three years?"

Seward gasped. "Good God! I didn't hear that! Is it authentic, Russell?"

"I believe that it is," replied the war correspondent.

Seward jumped to his feet. "Welles and Cameron must know this, at once. Excuse me, Russell!" He rushed from the room.

The two men left before the fire looked at each other, and Lincoln smiled. Russell seemed puzzled. "Mr. Welles is Minister of the Navy and Mr. Cameron of War, are they not?"

"Secretaries, we call 'em."

"But surely they must have the report?"

"Just to make sure, I sent it to them an hour ago," replied the President, dryly. "Seward will find one at his house or office."

There was a pause, during which the Englishman pondered heavily, and Lincoln turned over in his mind the questions on the theory of democracy he would like to discuss with him. But before he could frame the first query Russell broke the silence.

"Mr. Seward is a very important figure in your country."

"None more so," replied the President. "It was fully expected that he'd be Republican nominee for this job, and he deserved the nomination far more than I did. In fact, I'm a good deal like the fellow who wandered out in his pasture during a storm to find his cows, put up an umbrella, and the lightning struck him! I've held almost no office. Seward, on the other hand, has been Governor of one of our greatest States, and is our foremost party manager. He has been a Senator, and is a distinguished lawyer. He, rightly, has enormous weight in this country."

"Are you to be quoted on this, Mr. President?" asked Russell.

"I suppose I've said nothing that couldn't be printed," replied Lincoln, carefully, "but I reckon we'd better agree right here that you quote me to no one. I'd like to have you get the English people started right on Seward, though. He's going to kick over the traces a bit, and have trouble sticking near the starting post. But if he strikes his possible stride, no one can beat him in his job."

Russell was again eyeing Lincoln keenly and thoughtfully. "Perhaps, Mr. President, you'd be interested in hearing the opinion of Seward I've sent to the *Times?*"

"Yes, I'd like to hear it!" exclaimed Lincoln.

Russell pulled out his notebook and began to read: "Seward, a subtle, quick man, rejoicing in power, given to perorate and to oracular utterances, fond of badinage, bursting with the importance of state mysteries, and with the dignity of directing the foreign policy of the greatest country,—all Americans think,—in the world."

He put up the notebook, but before Lincoln could speak, Mrs. Lincoln burst into the office. Her face was flushed, her eyes dark, and she spoke breathlessly:

"Mr. Lincoln, I must have your ear for a moment!"

Russell rose, bowing to Mary as she said, "Pardon me, sir! But I've received such an especially insulting letter that I can't put off showing it to Mr. Lincoln."

"I'll withdraw, at once, Madam President," murmured the Englishman.

"No, you won't, sir!" declared Lincoln. "I want to thresh out several matters with you. Mary, let me introduce Mr. Russell of the London *Times*, and let me see that letter."

Mary offered her hand with a quick smile that did not, however, quench the anger in her blue eyes. "Mr. Hay told me that you were in Washington. We shall hope to see you at the White House frequently."

"You are very gracious—" began Russell.

He was interrupted by an angry snort from Lincoln. "Here, Russell, look at this gush of sewage! What can a man in my job do when his wife receives that kind of an insult?"

The Englishman read, his ruddy face turning a slow purple as he did so. Having finished, he dropped it to the floor, as though the slime it contained were tangible. He and Lincoln looked at each other.

"How about giving it to your police?" asked Russell. "It's unsigned, you see."

"Right!" nodded Lincoln, "I'll do that, to-night."

"But what I want to know," cried Mary, "is this! Leaving out the nastiness, is the letter true? Is there a cabal formed here in Washington strong enough to wreck any social efforts I make as mistress of the Executive Mansion?"

"Mary, I'm afraid they're going to try," replied Lincoln, sadly. "It's one of the prices you pay for being my wife."

"But have you facts, Mr. Lincoln?" demanded Mary.

The President turned to the reporter. "You've only been in Washington a short time. What have you heard?"

Russell looked at Mary apologetically. "The women of secession sympathies are vehement, active, and extraordinarily venomous. Much of their venom seems to be aimed at Mrs. Lincoln."

Mary sank into the chair Seward had vacated. "It doesn't seem possible!" She looked from her husband to the Englishman. "You know a good deal about the society of capitals, I'm sure, Mr. Russell. Give me some advice."

"Ask the President to require the secretary who opens his mail to open yours also. You should never see such letters," replied Russell promptly. "As for the others, I'd devote all my thoughts and talents to the President's constituents."

"Never!" cried Mary. "I mean—as to the matter of the letters, your advice is excellent. The letters shall go to young Stoddard. But as to the rest of it,—give in weakly to those hussies? Cease at the behest of this vile anonymity to hold my levees and balls? Why, the idea is preposterous! I'll fight them with my last breath!"

"Bravo!" exclaimed Russell. "Command me to help you in any possible way, Madam President."

Mary laughed excitedly. "I shall, indeed. We'll see! Fort Sumter and I are both flying the flag. We shall—" The door from the family sitting room slammed, and the three before the fire turned to behold Willie clinging to the knob.

"Mamma, I want the arnica bottle," he said.

"Willie, what have you been doing? Come into the light where I can see you!" exclaimed his mother.

Willie came slowly forward. His black hair was disheveled, his lower lip was bleeding, his collar torn, and his trousers mud stained. He paused beside his father, who pulled him gently to his great knees, and began to staunch the dribble of blood with a red cotton handkerchief. The firelight flickered unevenly on the group, and Russell regarded it, with sudden tenderness in his cynical eyes.

"What's been troubling you, sweetheart?" asked Lincoln.

"Out on Pennsylvania Avenue, just now, I went to the little refreshment stand to buy some pop," replied Willie, his boyish voice unhurried, like his father's. "A lady was there buying some for her boy. I guess he's about fourteen. And this lady said to the other lady that yonder was the White House, where the Illinois gorilla and his ape wife were setting up their menagerie. I couldn't hit the lady, so I licked jelly out of the boy. I hate Washington."

"Oh, that's not right for a child to hear such things! How can they! What have we ever done?" cried Mary, dropping to her knees before Willie, and kissing his grimy hand.

"Don't be too troubled, wife," begged Lincoln. "You and Willie can't fight my battles. And that's all it is. Just trying to hurt me through you."

Willie suddenly blinked back tears. "I'll always fight 'em! With my last breath, I'll fight 'em!"

"Look here, old chap," said Russell, suddenly, to Willie, "if you'll show me where to get some ice, I'll show you how to take the swelling from that lip, quite in the manner of the best prizefighter."

"Do you know any prizefighters?" asked Willie, eagerly.

"I've seen all the best of them and know them, too," said Russell, rising.

Willie left his father and slipped his fingers into Russell's. "I like English men better than American ladies," he volunteered. "You helped me out when Tad vomited the other night. Come on, we'll find James. And Tad will want to see the blood."

He was still chattering, in his unhurried voice, as the door into the sitting room swung behind him and his guest. Mary and her husband stared at each other in a silence too pregnant for speech.

CHAPTER III

THE FIRST LEVEE

TO Lincoln, the levee on the eighth of March was not an unamusing affair, primarily because of Seward. He thought of Russell's characterization of the Secretary of State a number of times during the evening, and chuckled as he thought. For, while the President and Mrs. Lincoln received the endless stream in the Blue Room, Seward established himself in the Green Room, within the President's line of vision, and there received tribute from a stream, which, though not so long, was in many ways more brilliant, and certainly more deferential, than that which passed by Lincoln.

In a momentary lull in the handshaking ordeal, Mary touched her husband's arm. She was wearing a magenta, brocaded silk dress and looked, Lincoln thought, as though she belonged in the elaborately furnished drawing room, with its candelabra, its carved cabinets, its guilt and satin furnishings.

"Getting tired, Mary?" he asked.

She shook her head. "Have you observed Governor Seward? What stupid fools make up our public!"

"I'm more grateful to him every minute for taking up some of my slack," declared the President, rubbing his aching hand.

"Look; who's that with him now?" asked Mary. "What a wonderful looking man! Is it another Englishman? Lord Lyons?"

"That's Charles Sumner, Senator from Massachusetts," replied Lincoln. "He and Seward will have many a tussle before the crop's husked out. Sumner's now Chairman of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations."

A man of Lincoln's own great height towered high above little Seward's white head. For a moment, Mary could see him clearly, then the crowd closed in, and only her husband could observe the face of the Senator from Massachusetts. It was a face familiar enough to the President, one that he thought again, as he had many times before, was the most winning in expression he ever had seen. The broad, massive forehead, from which was tossed back thick, brown hair, only lightly touched with gray, although Sumner was fifty, the deep blue eyes, the well cut lips were the fine embodiment of the essentially noble spirit of the man.

Over the heads of the milling crowd, President and Senator caught each other's gaze, and for a moment gray eyes held blue. A little later, Sumner, with a lady on his arm, came to a halt before the Presidential party, and the crowd, willy-nilly, was deflected, as though a great boulder had dropped into a current, thrusting it from its course.

"I'm glad to see you, Sumner," said Lincoln.

"And I you, Mr. Lincoln. May I present my friend, Miss Ford, from the red hills of Virginia, one of the social leaders of the old South in Washington?"

Lincoln made his quick, quaint bow over the languid hand of the tall, striking-looking young woman in green silk.

"I'm not sure that is a tactful recommendation to a Republican administration," exclaimed Miss Ford, in her curiously clear and penetrating, though drawling, voice.

"But my wife would say you were the more welcome as a Virginian, to a Republican levee, I reckon," said the President, presenting the Senator and Miss Ford to Mary.

"This is the first time in six years that I've entered the White House portals, Madam President," said Sumner. "I regard this as one of the most privileged moments of my life."

"Mary," Lincoln's hand was on Sumner's shoulder, "take a good look at this fellow. Seward told me once that Sumner was his ideal of a cosmopolitan, but I disagree with Seward. Sumner's my ideal of a bishop, though I never met one."

Mary, who had been exchanging greetings with Miss Ford, looked up into the Senator's face. She liked Sumner instantly and warmly. And Sumner, keen observer of women, perceived in the President's wife that intellectual vitality and acumen which he told himself could be little appreciated by the type of men and women with whom her lot was cast.

"After all," said Mary, "I don't see why one ideal is necessarily incompatible with the other."

"When you know me better," Sumner was smiling, "I think you'll discover I'm nothing so unhuman as either."

"Come, Senator, do give me an opportunity to admire Mrs. Lincoln's dress!" protested Miss Ford. "You have the most perfectly monopolistic manner I've ever seen. I suppose you acquired it in London drawing rooms. It's not American, I assure you."

"What must I do?" asked Sumner. "Am I not to keep you sheltered from the mob?"

Mary gave Miss Ford a second keen look, which took in the beautiful chestnut ringlets, the flashing violet eyes, the clear cut mouth and chin. She at once discovered that out of all the hundreds of women's faces that had moved before her vision that night, this one alone roused her interest. She drew Miss Ford a little back of the receiving line. Charles Sumner followed, glancing from one woman to another, his blue eyes amused and keen.

"It was charming of you to come to-night," began Mary.

"Not at all," protested Miss Ford, handing her huge ostrich feather fan to Sumner, who immediately began to wave it with the skill of long usage. "I've heard so much gossip about you, Madam President, that frankly, I came to see for myself."

Mary flushed a little as she smiled. "Ah! You are frank, indeed! May I be equally frank, and ask you what your report to your friends will be?"

"That you have a charming taste in dress!" sweeping Mary with a glance. "As for the rest, I am sure they must be mistaken."

Senator Sumner gasped at this exchange of feminine amenities. "But, my dear Miss Ford—!"

"Don't bother, Senator!" exclaimed Mary. "I understand. Miss Ford is giving me a chance. The rest are condemning me unseen and unheard. I am grateful to her."

"You are keen, Madam President," drawled the Virginian. "You see, I've always been a friend of the White House, and mighty proud of the privileges I possessed here. Of course, of political necessity, those days are gone. I myself am retiring to our plantation near Fairfax Court House. I don't expect to live in Washington again till our family fortunes have been retrieved. But when that time comes, if you all are still here, I'd like to feel I still could drop in for a cup of tea at the White House, as of old. Politics should not prejudice social habits."

Mary's blue eyes brightened with each of Miss Ford's slow spoken sentences. "When are you leaving for the plantation, Miss Ford?" she asked, eagerly.

"As soon as I can rent our house here, Madam President."

"Before you go, say to-morrow afternoon, will you not revive your old custom by taking tea with me? You are so frank! I am, if you will come, going to presume upon your frankness by asking you questions about the social problems I am meeting here."

The Virginian laughed. "That might be interesting, might it not, Senator?"

"No one could help Mrs. Lincoln more than you, Miss Ford, if you will bury animosity," he replied, seriously.

"Animosity? I am no Secessionist, Senator!" exclaimed Miss Ford. "I'm a pro-slavery Unionist."

"I don't care what you are!" declared Mary. "Come and have tea with me."

The Virginian hesitated for a moment, then with a sudden stretching of her hand to Mary, she exclaimed, "Well, thank you; I reckon I can't resist your cordiality, Madam President. I'll come! Senator, if you'll see me to my carriage, I'll relieve you of that fan."

With a swirl of billowing silk skirts, she made her bow and moved away.

Late the following afternoon, Miss Ford arrived at the White House. She was accompanied by a negro maid, who bore in her arms two squirming pups. Mary received her guest in the family sitting room, upstairs, for it was the only spot in the house outside of the bedroom safe from office seekers.

"The hound dogs are for your two boys," drawled the Virginian. "Our old Sally littered in Washington, and I can't bother taking six pups out to the plantation, when we already have sixty of 'em. Put them on the hearth-rug, Jinny, and wait for me in the carriage."

"And ask the door man to send my two sons here at once, please, Jinny," added Mary with an apprehensive eye on the rug and the puppies.

"Of course I know they'll become an intimate scourge in your household," continued Miss Ford, seating herself with a careless and graceful adjustment of her crinoline.

"But the only thing I know for sure about boys is that they like dogs."

"You're wonderfully kind," exclaimed Mary, really touched. "Ah, here they are!" as the two boys burst into the room. "Willie and Tad, come here before you touch the dogs, and meet Miss Ford; then thank her for the gift."

With the hasty casualness of childhood, the boys shook hands, then leaped together for the hearthrug.

"The one with the black patch on his eye is mine!" shouted Taddie.

"He's not! He's the biggest so he's mine!" in Willie's unhurried tones.

"You di'ty skunk—" began Tad.

Mary made no futile comment or gesture. She crossed the room, put a pup under either boy's arm, took each boy by an ear, and marched them to the hall door. "Out you go, gentlemen all," she said and closed the door firmly after them.

"Are they often like that?" drawled Miss Ford, as Mary, a little breathless, returned to her chair before the window.

"That was mild. They are real boys," replied Mary, "so admonition is wasted on them. They'll crowd till they come up against something firm."

"And you are that something firm, I imagine," said the Virginian, fine, violet eyes fixed on Mary with interest.

"I try to be," replied Mary. "I suppose they appear rude and unattractive to you, as you don't know boys. But really, lads of their age are very lovable, and it's not always easy to be harsh with them as one must be."

"Shall you send them to school?" asked Miss Ford.

"We think not. In a school they'd be both spoiled and insulted. We shall have tutors."

"Insulted?" Miss Ford pulled off her long black gloves, and adjusted the wide lace collar that fell over her sloping shoulders.

Mary's eyes blazed as she nodded. "I'll explain to you what I mean," and she told of the letter she had received and of Willie's fight.

"What fools people are!" exclaimed the Virginian when Mary had finished. "I love your young Willie. He should have been a Virginian."

"He is one, remotely, on both his father's and my side." Mary looked out the window to the hills that rolled beyond the Potomac. "I am a Kentuckian, myself, though, and as proud of that as you are of being a Virginian."

"How could you marry a Republican, then?" cried Miss Ford.

"I didn't marry a Republican," declared Mary, stoutly. "I married"—she paused thoughtfully, then she lifted her chin—"I married an intellectual and spiritual giant—hidden for the sins of some other life in the casings of a backwoodsman."

If Miss Ford felt an inclination to sneer, she hid it under an admirable show of sympathetic interest.

"I've helped him a little," Mary went on, "but not much. He's unique, predestined. I've given him the normal life of a husband and father without which he might have grown awry. That's all."

There was a moment's silence, after which Miss Ford asked gently, "Is it your plan to introduce the President to social Washington?"

Mary laughed. "Thrust a full grown oak into a tiny garden of annuals? But I'm really not the fool you think me, my dear! *I* am the member of the family with social ambitions."

Miss Ford put more sugar in her tea, and stirred it gracefully, while she studied the shabby Brussels carpet with its design of an upset basket of roses.

"Ah," she sighed, at last, "I understand how intriguing it must have been to marry such a giant, even though it was a bitter dose for a Kentuckian to marry a man with Mr. Lincoln's partiality for niggers."

Mary's small figure in the huge padded arm chair drew itself erect. "You are mistaken on two counts, Miss Ford. Though I am a Kentuckian, I don't support slavery. Mr. Lincoln has no partiality for niggers, as such."

"You see," drawled the Virginian, "I own that black girl, Jinny, and some twenty other niggers, in my own right. My father owns about a hundred field hands and a dozen house niggers. I haven't any desire to be stripped of my property by this administration or any other."

"But how could we strip you?" exclaimed Mary, impatiently. "All Mr. Lincoln desires is to keep the Union together. He knows he has no right to destroy slavery."

Miss Ford's occasional dimple came into play. "I am so relieved! As long as you and the President are not Abolitionists, I am yours to command."

"Abolitionist! I abhor the thought!" cried Mary. "Do have a fresh cup of tea and tell me, what can I do to overcome this dreadful cabal that has been raised against me in Washington. You see," as Miss Ford's eyebrows arched, "I am taking the bull by the horns, if you'll pardon the figure."

"Can you endure straight facts, Madam President?" asked Miss Ford.

Mary compressed her lips for a moment before replying. "I must endure them, if my life here is not to be a social fiasco. If I understand conditions, perhaps I can combat them."

"I believe that you can!" exclaimed the Virginian. "And if I can help you otherwise than by what I am about to tell you, I am yours to command. I certainly do admire spunk."

Thereupon, Miss Ford gave a good half hour to instructing Mary Lincoln with regard to the ramifications of Washington society. She spoke with a sardonic deliberation that fascinated her hearer, who realized that she was being given an invaluable cross section of the social intrigues of the women of the Capital.

It was twilight, and the boys had brought the puppies back to visit their former mistress, before Miss Ford left the White House.

CHAPTER IV

MISS FORD

LINCOLN brought all three of his secretaries to the supper table that evening in an endeavor to catch up with the hundred matters he had been obliged to overlook during the day. Mary did not intrude on the business at hand. She devoted herself to the boys' table manners.

But for a hurried moment, as her husband left the dining room she caught his hand.

"Miss Ford is going to help at my first levee, Abra'm!" she began.

"Yes! Yes, dear Mary!" stooping to kiss her. "You call on young Stoddard to help you with your invitations. I'm on my way to the Cabinet meeting."

And he was gone, leaving Mary and young Stoddard smiling at each other in bewilderment.

This first official Cabinet meeting had cost Lincoln much thought. His desire had been to deal with his Secretaries separately, until he and they had the routine of business well in hand. But the machinations of the Secessionists were forcing him out of his leisurely pace. His difficult assistants would have to learn to pull together at once, and not after they had adjusted themselves to office.

He looked about the long table for a moment before speaking, at these faces, none of which he believed looked on his with actual friendliness. Then he gave the reason that had forced him to what he felt was a premature session.

"Gentlemen, General Scott told me, to-day, that he wants us to evacuate Fort Sumter."

For a moment there was shocked silence.

Seward was the first to speak. "Evacuate, then, by all means! We'll soon have South Carolina back in the Union. What does it matter?"

Chase, the Secretary of the Treasury, and the handsomest man in the Cabinet, leaned toward Lincoln, and said in the voice one would use to an ignorant child:

"Don't you know that giving up Fort Sumter will finally convince the South that we are all supine cowards?"

Bates, the Missourian, banged on the table. "Never! Reënforce, if it requires fifty thousand men."

Lincoln's face was inscrutable. The three men of his Cabinet who had been his chief rivals for the Presidency had spoken.

Montgomery Blair, a Blair of Maryland, jumped to his feet, overturning his chair. "By the living God, Mr. President, I'd not only reënforce, but I'd send fifty thousand men into South Carolina to bring her to her senses, as Andrew Jackson threatened to do when that traitorous State attempted nullification."

"I'd like further information," said Welles, cautiously. The white-bearded Secretary of the Navy from Connecticut was a Democrat, and out of sympathy with every one in the room.

Before Lincoln could reply, Seward began an elaborate explanation of general conditions. Maryland was probably hostile to the Union. Virginia, as well as Tennessee, was wavering. Still, under his own careful manipulations, he was sure they would be saved. Let force be used to take Fort Sumter, and these States surely would join the so-called Confederacy. He could save the country from actual war he was sure, but he must have time, time.

"Time! Time!" sneered Blair. "You parade your office, Seward, while treason thrives on your intrigues."

"Come, Blair, isn't that a little strong?" protested Seward, with fine good nature.

"You talk too much, Mr. Seward," snapped Welles. "You'll chatter us into war, yet."

Bates and Smith began to whisper together. Seward rapped on the table. "Gentlemen, you ask for information. How can I give it to you unless you favor me with your undivided attention?"

Welles turned angrily to the President, who sat with a leg flung carelessly over one arm of his chair.

"Is ex-Governor Seward chairman of this meeting, sir? Is he privy to your information? Is it fair to the rest of us that he should be so?"

"Seward has been seeing a lot of folks, Mr. Welles," replied Lincoln. "Let's get his report on 'em. Go ahead, Governor. What do you reckon you'll do if you have time?"

"This must be unofficial," said Seward, "but the Secessionists have sent three commissioners up here, and I'm in constant communication with them."

"That's not proper," exclaimed Smith, the Secretary of the Interior.

"What about?" demanded Blair.

"Who are they?" asked Chase.

"They have come to treat with the Administration for the recognition of the Confederacy," was Seward's unperturbed reply. "I hope to gain time by offering to negotiate with them."

"And you permit this, Mr. President?" gasped Welles.

"I?" Lincoln smiled. "I do not recognize the existence of a Confederacy! Now, then, friends, you have all the facts I have regarding Fort Sumter. Within the next two weeks I hope to have more. In the meantime, I shall take all your opinions under advisement. Please give me at any time, any facts or ideas that may come to your minds."

"Mr. President, when shall you call the next Cabinet meeting?" asked Welles.

The President hesitated. Seward replied for him. "I'll undertake to let you know, Mr. Welles."

"You?" exclaimed the Secretary of the Navy. "Thank you! But I know of no reason that prevents my dealing directly with the President."

Lincoln spoke soberly. "Meetings must be irregular until the confusion of office seekers, and our newness to the routine of the jobs subside. I certainly shall not fail to take direct counsel with each or all of you when need arises."

"But what is to be done about Sumter?" insisted Blair.

Again Seward attempted to reply, and again Welles and Blair raised their voices in violent protest against what they styled his officiousness.

Lincoln watched and listened with absorbed interest. A Cabinet of brilliant men he had desired, and had procured. But also it appeared he had gathered together men of violent feelings, deep egotism, childish antipathies, and each one as personal in his reactions as Mary, in her most personal moments.

So far, Lincoln had known these men only in their public capacities—as Democrats and Republicans, as Radicals or Conservatives, as Senators, Judges, Governors. Before he could hope to head up this alarmingly accomplished group, he must know them as human beings. A few more sessions like this, he told himself, and their characters would be exposed as no number of individual conferences would expose them. Jealousy is a pitiless betrayer of the weak and sordid in human desires. Ever since boyhood, Lincoln had been a close and practical student of local politicians. These men differed little, he thought, from those with whom he long had had intimate contacts.

It was late when the meeting ended, and it ended with no policy formulated for the handling of the fort in Charleston harbor. For a long time after the meeting had adjourned, the President sat before the fire, passing in review each of the seven men he had asked to help him through the impending crisis. His mind remained longest with Seward. Of all the men in the Cabinet, Seward was the most nearly essential for the success of the task Lincoln had set himself. And yet, he was the most dangerous to the welfare of the country. For, as Lincoln had discovered in the past few weeks, Seward was not a statesman but a politician; he was a profound egoist and a busybody. Controlled and directed to a great single purpose, no man in the United States could be more useful. Uncontrolled, he would waste his great talents and the resources of his office on a thousand abortive alarms and excursions.

The clock on the mantel struck eleven as the door opened. Lincoln was expecting Nicolay to bring him a report on possible legal methods of forcing the collection of internal revenue in the seceded States. He held out his hand without turning his head.

"All right, Nicolay! You must be tired, boy. Go to bed."

"Mr. President!" said a woman's voice.

Lincoln came slowly to his feet. Miss Ford, in a green velvet riding habit, was standing near the door, which she had closed suddenly behind her.

"How did you get here, Madam?" exclaimed the President.

"Nothing could be simpler, my dear Mr. Lincoln," tossing her riding crop on the table, and seating herself before the fire. "Your doorman was asleep, as the rest of your household seems to be. I was belated in a ride into the country, and on sudden impulse, I stopped here. I am a creature of impulse."

"I see," said Lincoln, thinking, as he looked at her deep-set eyes and firm, curved lips, that he never had seen a face more brilliantly and coolly calculating. "What can I do for you?"

"Mr. Lincoln," leaning toward him, eagerly, "I know how irregular this proceeding is—but—well, Mrs. Lincoln has made a tremendous impression on me. I want to help her."

It seemed to Lincoln that he never had seen a handsomer woman, and he told himself, whimsically, that she was more dangerous to unprotected men than all of old General Scott's militia.

"What makes you think my wife needs help?" he asked.

"Two things. First, as a Virginian who leads an active social life, I know how bitterly the women of Washington are going to wage war on her. Second, because she showed me this afternoon that she intended to make an aggressive little war of her own. She is an extremely able person. I think if she receives the right kind of advice for a few weeks, she will work wonders. But if she goes on in the recalcitrant spirit in which she is beginning, she will fail, ignominiously."

Lincoln nodded. "You think you could give her that advice?"

"I certainly do. But I shall need your backing."

"Mine? My dear Miss Ford, I never make suggestions to Mrs. Lincoln about her tea fights and such. I'm not fitted for it. Out home she managed things fine. I realize, of course, that she's got a very different nut to crack here, but I don't see where my backing will help." He rose to lean against the mantel. He was tired, and, for all his desires to make Mary happy, social intrigues were the last things that could touch his interest. "You fix up any arrangement you like with my wife. Don't bother me about it," with a little smile.

Miss Ford's expression was bewildered. "But the suggestion I had to make involves the outlay of money."

"All right! The Madam holds the purse strings in our family," suppressing a yawn.

She took the hint and rose. "But, Mr. President, this involves you. Young Stoddard is no help to Mrs. Lincoln. I want you to appoint me as one of the White House secretaries, and allow me to manage the social end for both of you. Don't let your lack of social experience blind you to the importance of your entertaining adequately and elegantly."

"Have you mentioned this to Mrs. Lincoln?" asked the President.

"Yes, this afternoon, and she said I'd have to speak to you. I got to thinking about it, on my ride, and as I'd heard that the only chance to catch you alone was late at night, here I am." She smiled at him, as though to say that she was throwing herself on his mercy.

Lincoln sighed. He liked women, but he knew that he was no judge of them. Even as a lawyer, he was hopelessly sentimental in handling them. Some thought of this made him unwontedly cautious.

"All my secretaries are recommended by folks I know and trust," he said. "Who will recommend you, if my wife and I should agree that such an arrangement is such as she might like."

"Mercy!" making a little face, "how important you make it sound. Well, Senator Sumner is my friend and—"

"Sumner would be enough, in case Mrs. Lincoln takes a notion to carry the idea through," the President interrupted. "I'll talk it over with her. I'll call young Hay or Stoddard to see you home, if you wish, Miss Ford."

"No, please! Old Uncle Ben, my butler-groom, is outside with my horse."

"Then I'll see you to the door, myself," offering her his arm with the comical, snapping bow that already was one of Washington's jokes.

They paced slowly along the dimly lighted halls, to the lobby, where old Edward, his lined, Irish face relaxed in sleep, sat bolt upright inside the door. Lincoln, smiling like a boy in mischief, tiptoed past him and opened the door. The Virginian slipped out into the March wind.

The President returned to the second floor, and put his head quietly into the door of the secretaries' office. Hay was not to be seen. Nicolay sat at his desk, his head on his arms, fast asleep. Lincoln crossed the room, and put his hand on the young man's shoulder. Nicolay bounded to his feet, blinked and apologized.

The President slipped an arm around him. "Come with me, George. There's something I want you to do."

He led Nicolay out of the office and into the bedroom next door, where, with the light dimmed, young Hay already lay fast asleep. Lincoln led the young man up to the bedside.

"Here!" he exclaimed. "Is a hint enough, or do I have to undress you myself, George?"

Nicolay laughed. "You're too good to me, sir. I haven't finished the report."

"But you've finished yourself! Can't have you done up before the race begins. Look at John, there! Doesn't look a day over eighteen. Nice boy! Good big funny-bone!" Lincoln pulled the quilt over young Hay's shoulders and tiptoed out.

He did not return to his office, but with a lighted candle, which he took from the hall table, he entered one of the bedrooms opposite his and Mary's. Willie lay with a pillow over his head and a puppy curled up against his back. Lincoln removed the pillow, kissed the boy's moist forehead, and went into Tad's room. Tad's covers were on the floor. Tad's feet were on his pillow on which also lay a whimpering little hound. Lincoln chuckled, turned the boy skillfully around to share the pillow with the pup, and lifted the covers over him. Then, shading the candle, he gazed down at the child.

"Pretty boy! Pretty little fellow! Wonderful to think of anything with that beauty coming from my loins," he thought. Then he crossed the hall into his wife's room.

She was propped up in bed reading, with a candle at her elbow. She looked up at her husband with a smile.

"Glad you're awake!" he exclaimed, putting his candle beside her, and sitting down on the bed. "I'm having trouble to ease myself to bed, to-night, somehow."

"Over-tired, poor dear!" murmured Mary. "Shall I read you to sleep?"

"I guess not, Mary. I just dismissed a lady visitor."

"For goodness' sake!" ejaculated Mary, her eyes twinkling. "Have they begun, already?"

"Seems like!" With a broad grin that quickly faded into a scowl of concentration. "It was that Miss Ford. Let me tell you."

He gave the details of the conversation.

Mary listened intently. "She went further than I meant," she said when Lincoln had finished, "but, if Charles Sumner recommends her, what do you think of the idea?"

"I can't put her on my official pay roll," replied the President. "If you want to pay her out of my salary, it's all right with me. You know what you want. I'll talk to Sumner to-morrow."

Mary nodded. "Let me know what he says. Where is Artemus Ward's latest effusion? I'll read you to sleep."

"No, save yourself for later, when the hard times come. I'll drowse off nicely. Good night, dearest Mary."

He lifted her in his great arms for a moment, then tucked her in as tenderly as he had Tad, took up his candle and went to bed.

CHAPTER V

BREAD FOR ANDERSON

CHARLES SUMNER appeared in Lincoln's office, the next day, to consult with him concerning the appointment of Charles Francis Adams as ambassador to England. The matter of Miss Ford had slipped from the President's mind, but Sumner, as the conference ended, paused with one huge, white hand on the door knob, and said:

"Miss Ford tells me that she hopes I will recommend her as a fourth secretary to the White House, Mr. President."

"Jings! I'd forgotten the lady!" exclaimed Lincoln. "What's she like, Senator? Anything back of this sudden spasm of helpfulness she evidences?"

"Indeed, I'm sure not!" Sumner's voice was a little indignant. "I've known her for years. She is altogether a charming and cultured lady, that is, as culture is rated in this country. Her father has met with heavy losses, and it's understood that she is financially much embarrassed. It must have taken an exceedingly great effort of will, to bring her petitioning to you. For not only is she a Virginian, but also she is a slave owner."

"What would be said if my wife employed a person of her political persuasions?" asked Lincoln.

"All Southerners would be pleased. Politically, I'd say that a more adroit motion could not be made." Sumner nodded sagaciously.

"Then I reckon I'll give Mary her head on the matter," Lincoln's voice expressed relief, "and forget it myself."

He was vaguely conscious, a week later, that Miss Ford's trunks were moved into the room next to that occupied by the little boys. But he was so irregular in his attendance at meals, his one opportunity to meet family guests, that it was a long time before the Virginian actually rose on his horizon.

By nature a man of most careless and casual habits, he was finding it exceedingly difficult to systematize his work, so that chaos should not completely hamper his efforts.

He managed after a few weeks to direct the great bulk of the office seekers to the various departments, but this seemed only to give greater opportunity to the self-appointed saviors of the nation, who thronged the White House and the Capitol, and all of the saloons and hotels of Washington.

As if to off-set the over-activity of those officious persons, there was every day more apparent an extraordinary inertia on the part of those who Lincoln had hoped would act most quickly. Old General Scott was dilatory in carrying out his orders. Seward ignored his suggestions. He even went so far as to hint, in a written memorandum, that Lincoln turn the reins of government over to the Secretary of State.

The President took all these manifestations of contempt for his ability with outward calm. Actually, he was deeply perturbed, but his unparalleled capacity for self-control enabled him to keep from making a move until he understood the natures of the men about him. His sense of proportion was rarely at fault. The point in Seward's insolent memorandum that really troubled him was not its insolence, but the fact that Seward showed a lack of common sense, when he suggested that the best way to prevent war breaking out in America was for America to find some pretext to declare war on Spain, France and England, in turn. A foreign war, declared the Secretary of State, would unite the North and South against a common enemy.

He squelched Seward's wild aspirations easily enough, in a return memorandum, then stood by the window of his office, looking, in a troubled way, at his family below. Young April was flushing over the White House garden. Mary was talking to the gardener. Tad and Willie were racing their hound dogs. Miss Ford was walking slowly along the paths, reading a letter. As the President looked out on the pleasant scene, a large man in riding clothes appeared in the garden. He bowed over Mary's hand, then over Miss Ford's.

"That's William Russell," murmured Lincoln. He suddenly leaned from the window. "Hey, Russell! come up here a moment, will you?" he called.

The Englishman looked up, bowed and started for the house. A moment later he entered the office.

"You're very scarce with your society as far as I'm concerned, Russell," exclaimed the President, crossing the room to greet him, and feeling again the sense of liking and admiration for the dark-faced war correspondent. "I hear you're going to make a trip South, and up the Mississippi valley."

"Yes, Mr. President. Miss Ford has been giving me a letter to friends in Alabama."

"I suppose she knows the best kind of folks," nodded Lincoln. "It doesn't take you long to get acquainted, does it? Miss Ford, for instance!"

Russell, a tall man, himself, looked up at Lincoln with a questioning expression, then looked out the window and back again before he replied:

"I did not meet her in the White House, your Excellency, although I believe she is by way of being one of the White House under-secretaries. I met her, last night, at a dinner a Mrs. Greenhow was giving to the three commissioners sent here, I believe, by Mr. Jefferson Davis. When I learned that Miss Ford was an intimate friend of Mr. Davis's, I asked her to give me a card of introduction to him."

"And I wonder what Charles Sumner would say to that!" exclaimed Lincoln. "Oh, well, why shouldn't she know him! And what if she does! She's not my secretary, Russell. She makes social war dances for my wife. What I called you up here for was to ask you what you think of Charles Francis Adams as our Minister for St. James. I suppose you've met him, too, by now?"

"Yes, Mr. President, I've had the pleasure of dining with him a number of times."

"Good! Draw up here by the window and give me your idea of what England would like to get from us in the shape of an ambassador. Jings, tall as you are, Russell, I can rub my nose on the top of your head." He was leading the Englishman by the arm toward an arm chair, as he spoke.

"I've been in certain wild parts of this globe, sir, where, if I'd had your inches, the natives would have made a god of me," smiled Russell. "If ever you grow dissatisfied with a mere presidency, I'll give you the address of my savage friends."

Lincoln laughed, and the conference was begun with the utmost good feeling on both sides. It ended abruptly, an hour later, when Tad rushed, shrieking, into the office. He would not stay to be comforted, and Lincoln looked after him uneasily, as the child fled through the private passage to the sitting room.

"I wonder if he's really hurt," he exclaimed.

Russell got to his feet. "Shall I go after him, Mr. President, or call his governess?"

"Our talk is over, I reckon," said Lincoln, whose heart was always torn when Taddie wept, "so I'll go, myself. Let me see you again before you start South," and he hurried into the sitting room.

Tad was not there, but his shrieks led the President on into his own bedroom. Tad had flung himself on his father's bed. Lincoln stooped over him.

"Get off! Away off, Papa day!" shrieked Tad. "I hate you! I hate Willie! Most of all I hate Miss Fo'd!"

"Come over here and tell me all about it," said his father, seating himself in his favorite chair by the window.

"No! No! No!" screamed the child.

The door from the hall opened and admitted Willie. He wore his best clothes, a dark green velvet round-about and long trousers of the same shade of broadcloth. A wide, white collar with a flowing green tie gave the final touch of festivity to his costume. The boy looked scornfully at his brother, and appealingly at his father.

"Something's got to be done about Taddie," he announced. "He says nobody can marry Miss Ford but him, then he— Hey, shut up that racket, Tad, so's I can tell Papa day!"

Tad suddenly sat erect, face sodden with tears. He, too, was dressed for a party. His was a wine-colored velvet suit, the coat edged about with silk braided scollops, a lace collar finishing the neck.

Immensely interested and edified, the President looked from one boy to the other.

"You tell it the way it was then," sobbed Tad.

"Don't I always?" drawled Willie. "Well, Papa, Tad can believe whatever he wants to about who is going to marry Miss Ford. I think myself that if I don't, John Hay will. But Tad oughtn't to get mad at one of mother's parties about it, so's everybody says the Lincolns don't know how to bring up children. Seem's to me they're saying enough stuff, without Tad's handing 'em something more."

"Well, I asked he'," Tad wiped his eyes on his sleeve, "and—"

"Wait a moment, boys. Willie, run in and get me a needle full of black linen thread out of your mother's basket. I pulled a suspender button off my new suit last night, and I forgot to tell Mamma. I'll sew it on while you fellows talk."

Willie flew on his errand, and Tad continued to sob, but softly now, and with constant repetitions of his last statement, "I asked he'—"

There was no coaxing him in one of his tantrums, so his father took his best trousers out of the wardrobe, put on his spectacles and, as Willie returned with the needle, seated himself, saying:

"Get on with the story before I'm interrupted, Willie."

"Well—" the older boy began, feet apart, head thrust forward in amusing imitation of his father's habitual position, as Lincoln observed with a chuckle, "well, mother was having tea in the Blue Room, and Mr. Mercier was there, and Miss Ford and two or three other ladies, like Mrs. Welles, and some of the Cabinet wives that don't amount to much."

"Who said that last?" interrupted Lincoln.

"I heard Miss Ford tell mother. And John Hay came in from some errand he'd been on, and asked for a cup of tea, and Mr. Sumner was there, and he'd been talking French with mother, and he said she spoke it wonderfully, and she said she'd been obliged to speak nothing else in the school where she went for four years, and I thought to myself, if everybody only knew how much mother did know it might make 'em ashamed, and just then Tad had to make a fool of himself."

"Tell what you did! Tell what you did!" shrieked Tad.

"Well, John Hay had been standing and talking to Miss Ford, holding a cup in one hand, with his little finger stuck out, like this, and his mouth all minced up polite, like this . . ." Lincoln gave a sudden shout of laughter, as he recognized John at his social best.

Willie gave his father an indignant look. The President became abnormally serious, and thrust his needle vigorously through the broadcloth. Willie proceeded.

"I'm not trying to be funny, I'm just telling you. Well, Miss Ford was looking up into John's face, like this." A lady, eyes rolled adoringly, was suggested. Lincoln choked, but said nothing. "Now you know, Papa day, Miss Ford is us boys' friend first. She gave us the pups. She didn't give John Hay anything. And I know him, how all the girls out in Springfield got crazy about him, and I decided I'd interfere. So I went out in the hall, like some one had beckoned, and came back and told John you wanted him. And he went. And before I could move, Tad, he climbs into Miss Ford's lap and jams her crinoline thing, and I just gave him a little pull, like that, and he goes crazy right off and yells that I'm a dirty skunk, and Miss Ford's his girl. And he knocked her tea cup over."

"You knocked it you'self, di'ty skunk," shouted Tad.

"I did not! And everybody looked shocked, and mother put us right out."

"Then what happened?" asked Lincoln.

"Well, I suppose you heard Tad come roaring up here. I walked a piece with Mr. Mercier, just to show I didn't care."

"And was Miss Ford burned with the tea?"

"Not to hurt. She passed Mr. Mercier and me in the hall, she and Mr. Sumner, and she smiled at us. I can make a bow just like Mr. Mercier's." An imaginary hat pressed against his heart, Willie made a profound obeisance.

"I like the way Mr. Sumner does it best," exclaimed Tad, jumping from the bed, lifting his father's high hat from the table to his head, then sweeping it through the air, and holding it at arm's length, before returning it to eclipse his flushed little face.

"This is the way Chevalier what-you-may-call-him, the Italian Minister, does it," proclaimed Willie, taking the hat.

Lincoln watched them from smiling, reminiscent eyes, eyes that saw a shadowy figure behind the little velvet-clad bodies—the figure of a boy in battered jeans, barefoot, destitute of the necessities of life. It was but a fleeting shadow, however, for the never long absent tap sounded on the door, and John Hay came in.

"I wanted a moment alone with you, sir," he said soberly.

"I suppose to announce your impending marriage." Lincoln spoke seriously.

John gasped. "God forbid! What do you mean, sir?"

"You've almost broken Tad's heart, coming between him and Miss Ford," replied Lincoln. "And it's not a laughing matter," he added hastily.

"I see," gulped John, looking from one boy to the other. "They both admit her charm. Why shouldn't I respond to it as well as they?"

"I asked he' fi'st," cried Tad.

"You may have her," declared John, "with one stipulation. If I promise not to become engaged to her, may I talk to her when she talks to me? She knows a great deal about Southern politics."

"Yes, you may do that," agreed Willie, with a generous air.

"What business you got saying that?" demanded Tad, belligerently, then turned to John. "Be polite to he', John, and I'll be satisfied with you' p'omise."

"That being settled, boys, scuttle to your room and get hands washed for supper," ordered his father, and for once they obeyed without protest.

The two men smiled at each other, then young Hay said, "Mr. Lincoln, what attitude are we to take toward the newspaper men? I mean those who we know are deliberately circulating lies about you? Don't we issue any contradictions at all?"

"Not unless I tell you to," replied the President. "I suppose something extra ornery has come up! Greeley calling names as usual?"

"Nothing so simple as that!"

"Chicago papers say I was drunk at my own table last night? They've said that so many times, I'd almost believe it myself if I read all the reports."

Young Hay shook his good looking black head. "It's not the published lie that's hard to scotch—! There's a newspaper man from New York, one of the hail-fellow, well-met type who claims to be rather an intimate of yours. You've never met him, and if I have my way you never shall. His special claim to fame is that you tell him your obscene stories."

"My what?" exclaimed the President.

John Hay flushed but went on steadily. "Nothing is more current in the country than the idea that you have a choice collection of dirty jokes that you spring on all occasions. This reporter has told a number that he claims you whispered in his ear. To-day, one reached Nicolay and me—a joke you are said to have perpetrated on a member of the Cabinet. It's so indecent that I can't repeat it. But it will make you infinite trouble when it reaches that Cabinet member's ear. I want you to authorize me to go to that reporter and flay him alive."

Lincoln looked at the excited young face with real affection. "John, you and George both know I don't tell obscene stories. And I know it. Before long, the Cabinet will recognize that fact. That's enough."

"I realize you can't authorize anything like that," blazed John, "but now you know, and I warn you that if I hear that beast repeating any of his filth, I shall knock him down."

"You can't knock him down, John. You aren't in a position to waste time scratching flea bites, when a cyclone is about to strike the house—but your loyalty warms my dried old heart. John, this man Russell—what do you think of him?"

"He knows more about war than any one in this country. He doesn't get on well with American reporters, because the London *Times* wants facts, and our papers want scare heads. He's insulted a lot of distinguished politicians, because he won't let them spit tobacco juice on the floor of his room, like they do on the White House floors. He's a remarkably fair and keen observer. I tell you, sir, I hope to write one day, and I'd like to learn my trade from him. I'm dropping in on him all I can."

"That's right. Keep in touch with him. And this Miss Ford. What does she want?"

John flushed ever so slightly. "Nothing, I think, sir, except a little social excitement."

"Hum!" murmured Lincoln. "What's that book sticking out of your pocket, John?"

"Walt Whitman's 'Leaves of Grass.' Oliver Wendell Holmes says there's all kinds of leaves in it except fig leaves, but I don't see anything in it to shock anybody. Care to take a look at it?"

"I know pages of it by heart," said the President, rising to pull off his coat and vest. "There was a copy around the office at Springfield. That fellow Whitman isn't a poet, but he's the prophet of democracy. He's helped me a good deal when I've got bilious wondering if any government which is not too strong for the liberties of the people can be strong enough to maintain itself."

He sat down on the edge of the bed and removed his boots, displaying the gray wool socks he wore without regard to season or place. Slowly, his fine, wistful eyes on John's eager face, he removed his snuff-colored trousers, and began to draw on the black broadcloth.

"That's the eternal problem of America," he went on. "The Fathers thought they'd solved it in the Constitution. Whitman thinks what he calls 'the indissoluble love of comrades' is inherent in democracy, and will give it eternal life." He pulled his suspenders over his shoulders and tested the strength of the button he had sewed on.

"And does Whitman's answer satisfy you, Mr. Lincoln?" asked young Hay.

"One side of me," replied the President. "He's a man, is Whitman. I'd like to know him. . . . Wish you'd go out and buy me some white gloves, John. I can't remember where I put my last pair. That is, if you can spare the time. Going out to supper?"

"I've plenty of time," replied John. "I'm dining late at M. Mercier's, with Russell, Lord Lyons, and lesser lights. M. Mercier threatens to call on me for a toast to Russell."

"Good! That portion of the show won't be dry, I know!" the President, donning a fresh collar, smiled at the young man.

John paused with his hand on the door knob. "Hay that is green, sir, can never be dry," he chuckled, and was gone.

CHAPTER VI

THE QUALITY OF MERCY

THIS night of April first, the initial State dinner took place. It was a tedious affair, followed by an informal session of the Cabinet, during which Lincoln tried to beguile the members into agreeing on some policy toward the relief of Fort Sumter.

While the prolonged wrangling that followed the President's first suggestions was going on, a quite different type of conference on the same subject was in progress in a not far distant part of Washington.

Miss Ford's house was boarded up as to windows, and linen draped as to furniture. None the less, a fire crackled in the back parlor grate, and Miss Ford herself sat in its blaze, talking with Justice Campbell.

At the moment Lincoln was making his first gently expressed pronouncement on the urgency of this Sumter problem, Miss Ford was saying to the Justice:

"I have seen almost nothing of the President, so far, Judge, but I have access as I wish to his papers. I never saw so careless a man in my life. He trusts every one. He's reading a book on military science—Halleck's, I think, whoever that may be. He left it lying in the sitting room to-night, with these two papers in it as markers. I borrowed them for the evening."

She passed to Campbell Seward's memorandum and a copy of Lincoln's reply. The justice read them with avidity. He returned Seward's proposals with the remark, "the man's a cheap jingoist." Lincoln's answer he studied for several moments, before laying it on his knee, and looking up to say slowly to the Virginian:

"Whoever wrote this has produced a state document that no ruler ever excelled in astuteness. If Lincoln wrote it, the whole Secession party is acting on a wrong theory."

"Lincoln wrote it," said Miss Ford. "I heard Nicolay tell John Hay that 'the old man has written a scorcher to Seward. Wouldn't let me make a suggestion—' "

Campbell stared anxiously at the fire, then asked, "what about Mrs. Lincoln?"

"I am under the impression that she has a profound influence on her husband, but, frankly, I've seen so little of them together, and Mrs. Lincoln is for the moment so engrossed in planning how to cope with the female dragons of Washington, that I can't give you concrete evidence. By the way, isn't the Fort Sumter situation getting rather out of hand with Mr. Davis? Can't he control the Charleston crowd until you and the other commissioners have had your full opportunity? I believe that you underestimate the importance of the taking of Sumter on the attitude of the administration."

"Horace Greeley said yesterday, in an editorial, to let the South go. That he, for one, refused to live in a nation pinned together with bayonets," was Campbell's reply.

"But Greeley is an enemy to Lincoln's crowd," protested Miss Ford. "Read those notes on the back of Seward's memorandum. They are in Lincoln's handwriting."

The justice hastily turned the sheet indicated. Written in the President's cramped hand were several terse statements.

"Fort Sumter: Lamon and Hurlbut report no Union feeling in Charleston.

"Captain Fox's plan much simpler than Scott's for provisioning the fort. General Scott admits Fox navy plan of attack might be successful.

"The Secessionists need war to whip up general Southern enthusiasm for secession.

"If we give up Sumter, it will be to admit to the world that the Republic has fallen apart, that humanity's greatest experiment in democracy is a failure.

"If we move on Sumter, the war party, heading up in Charleston, will use the first move as an excuse for war.

"The Cabinet is divided, the decision rests with me."

Justice Campbell jumped to his feet and shook the paper before Miss Ford's intelligent eyes. "I've told them so! I've warned my colleagues, I've warned President Davis, that Pickens and his crowd would rush us into war!"

Miss Ford looked calmly up into his agitated face. "Why do you take it for granted that Lincoln will order Captain Fox to move?"

"Don't you think that he will?" demanded Campbell.

"No, I don't. We've probably underestimated his intelligence, but of his sentimental softness there can be no doubt. He can't say 'no' to an office seeker. His servants impose on him shamefully. His children tyrannize over him. He is utter mush in his Cabinet. He, as you see, takes an insult from Seward as most men would take a compliment."

"You say you've had no contacts with him in these two weeks. What have you been doing with your opportunities?" cried the justice, fretfully.

The Virginian drew herself up. "Sir, I have given you invaluable information, this evening. I dislike my work, exceedingly. I resign from this moment."

Campbell threw up his hands. "Oh, my dear Miss Ford, do permit me the luxury of relieving my frayed nerves by scolding! Surely that should not be too great a strain on our friendship. I am truly sorry. Will you not forgive me? You are not the only one doing distasteful work."

Instantly mollified, the Virginian rose to put her hand on the justice's arm. "I'm sorry too! My hasty temper hasn't improved in the fortnight. I've made copies of those papers, Judge. I'll leave the copies with you. I must return these with all speed. You can get the copies to President Davis at once? Tom Taylor hasn't returned from his trip to Montgomery."

"I'll take charge of them, Miss Ford," replied the justice, buttoning the papers into an inside pocket. "Now then, how can we sound out Lincoln? How can we make sure that that decision will be moving in our direction?"

Miss Ford looked thoughtfully at her finger nails. "Can't we give him some alleged secret information to the effect that Davis, if given a certain amount of time, can get control of the Charleston crowd?"

"Yes! Yes! But can we get any sort of guarantee from Governor Pickens and Beauregard, there in Charleston, that they will wait for Lincoln to make the first move?" cried Campbell.

"It's your business, isn't it, to re-assure Lincoln first and get the guarantee from Pickens, afterward?" asked the Virginian.

"I'll reach Lincoln, as I have before, through Seward. He's very easy to handle!" mused the justice. "Then I'll go to Charleston, myself. In the meantime, go to Lincoln, Miss Ford, to-morrow, and give him an inkling."

Miss Ford shook her head as she handed her mantua to the justice. "I must not rouse his suspicions. Or, if not his, those of his secretaries. They are decidedly on the *qui vive,* those lads. You see Seward early in the morning."

"Yes! Yes!" adjusting the mantua over the Virginian's beautiful shoulders. "You are quite safe to return to the White House by yourself?"

"Quite!" replied Miss Ford, somewhat drily, as she bowed to Campbell, and removed her enormous yardage of skirts from the room with the deliberate grace habitual to her.

She took a closed carriage to the main entrance of the Executive mansion, then undulated up the curving drive way to the portico. She arrived a few moments after the Cabinet members had dispersed. Old Daniel, who already was devoted to her,—she was that rare bird, a perfect lady, he said,—asked her if she had had a pleasant evening. Young Stoddard, meeting her on the staircase, begged for a flower from the wreath of roses in her hair, and told her that the family, including Hay and Nicolay, had gone to bed.

She fastened the rose in the boy's buttonhole, and traversed the deserted upper half with silent tread. Mrs. Lincoln's door was closed. That of the President was slightly ajar. She could hear him pacing the length of the room. Then she heard Mrs. Lincoln's voice.

"Aren't you going to bed, Abra'm? Here's the last *Petroleum Nasby?* Shall I read to you?"

"No, darling Mary. I'm going to climb into bed at once, and let friend Halleck on the Military Art and Science drowse me to sleep. Good night to you."

A short silence, then the click of the door into Mrs. Lincoln's room. Miss Ford took an irresolute step nearer to the gleaming crack. She caught a glimpse of the President in his night shirt, and, turning quickly, she hastened into the sitting room, then into her own quarters.

Lincoln picked up the copy of Halleck, turned toward the bed, hesitated, then stood long in thought, going over in his mind the fruitless bickering of the Cabinet session just passed. It was ghastly to think of the uncertainty that ruled these men, when certainty was so essential to save the country. He fluttered the pages of the book in his hand where he remembered leaving his notes on Fort Sumter. They were not there. Perhaps one of the boys had taken them. Perhaps they'd dropped out on the sitting-room table.

He drew on his faded dressing gown, thrust his feet into his slippers, and made his way to the deserted room, still warm with firelight that showed him his papers, lying on the floor beside the huge center table. He shook his head over his own carelessness and with remarkable quietness returned to his bedroom.

He held the notes in the back of Seward's memorandum close to the candle to review them, then dropped them and began to pace the floor.

The decision more certainly than ever, after to-night's session with Chase, Seward, Welles, and the rest of the oak-table crowd, was his to make. Very well, before he slept, he would make it.

Up and down, he paced, up and down. His own body, the objects in the candle- and fire-lighted room, the star-lit views from his windows, receded from his consciousness. He was alone in a universe of the spirit.

Mary came in at about two o'clock. She stood in silence by the window a long half hour. Lincoln did not see or hear her until she put her arm through his, and with eyes that told of her consuming anxiety, pressed her palm against his cheek, and forced him to look down at her.

"It is Sumter. It is war or dissolution," she said in a low voice.

"Yes!" replied Lincoln. "That's what slavery has brought the nation to; yet North and South tell me not to touch slavery."

"The North would not fight to set the slaves free," said Mary quickly.

"Not yet," agreed the President. "People don't understand yet." He resumed his slow pacing.

"Curiously," said Mary, keeping step with him, "if this were a decision concerning one of the children, or one of your clients or friends, I'd know your answer would be on the soft and easy side. But in this, which does not concern your affections, I know that your conclusion will be made with the ruthlessness that's the reverse side of your sweetness and patience."

Lincoln looked down at her. Her understanding seemed at the moment the one solid rock in the void where his spirit was wandering. He kissed her with lingering tenderness.

"Go to bed and rest, my darling Mary," he said.

"But I cannot sleep, Abra'm," humbly.

"You'll be resting and I must husk this out with my own hands."

Without another word, she left him, and he continued his solitary march. Bit by bit, he was placing his facts in their logical sequence. Not only contemporary and local facts, but world facts. He could see Europe gloating over the failure of the Union, and watching for an excuse to rush in and despoil the combatants.

If he relieved Sumter, war would come. Call it a war to save the Union. Aye, it would be a war for that purpose. But, basically, it would be a war caused by human slavery, and it was unthinkable that the Union and slavery should be saved together, that endless blood be shed, the war won, the South whipped back into the Union, with the viper still hanging to her breast.

This must not be.

If war came, it must come because the time had arrived when humanity must make another great stride in the struggle for freedom. The Magna Charta had guaranteed the freedom of those already free. Had the time come when a war could be fought in order to guarantee freedom to the bondman?

Up and down, up and down, mile after mile paced off over the shabby carpet. Could he make the awful resolve—the death-dealing, agony-bringing decision, and could he hold the decision thus made through months and years of carnage? Could he, in the name of freedom, deliberately turn America into hell on earth?

Solitary, fore-ordained, he wandered in profundity of thought that took no cognizance of time.

At dawn he paused, shivered, deadly pale. He glanced unseeingly around the room, realized with surprise that a new day had come, then crossed to his table where there were writing materials. He wrote a telegram and rang his bell. After a long wait, old Daniel appeared, blinking and startled. Lincoln gave him the message and asked for some coffee. Then he began to dress for the day's work.

The telegram bade Captain Fox proceed to the relief of Fort Sumter not later than the 6th of April.

CHAPTER VII

FORT SUMTER

WHILE Lincoln was at breakfast that morning, Seward rushed into the dining room, his vest unbuttoned, his tie flying.

"Mr. President," he panted, "news of unprecedented importance has just reached me. You must give me a private conference immediately."

"Must be unprecedented, Seward," said Lincoln, drily, "if you want advice from me on it."

Seward flushed, started to speak, then, as if conscious for the first time of Mrs. Lincoln, Miss Ford, and the two little boys, he greeted them, before saying to the President,

"I'm afraid I deserve that, sir. I received your reply to my memorandum, yesterday. After a night spent in pondering on its contents, I wish to say that I bow to the superior view."

Lincoln eyed the Secretary of State closely. No one knew how much it would mean to him if Seward would give over his dreams of leadership, and subordinate himself to his proper position. He rose from the table, took the smaller man by the arm, and led him into the State dining room.

"Here's the only private spot I can think of on the spur of the moment, Seward. What's on your mind?"

Seward hesitated for a moment. He moved away from Lincoln, in order to look up into the President's weary gray eyes. Suddenly Seward's face twitched. "Mr. Lincoln, as to my memorandum—I have underestimated your abilities. Will you accept my apology?"

Lincoln grasped the ex-Governor's hand, dropped it, and seized the frail little man in a great bear hug. "And now, by jings, let it rain!" he cried. "Our umbrella is raised!"

Seward tried to laugh, but was too much moved. "Your decision was right, Mr. President," he said, tremulously.

"Well," chuckled Lincoln, still holding Seward before him, "I hope I'm as right as Pat was. I was tramping to court when I was a young lawyer, too poor for a rig, when the judge came along in a closed carriage, and invited me to ride. I was mighty glad to climb aboard. But my happiness didn't last long. The judge's driver was sending the carriage from one side of the road to the other without aim or reason, and every moment seemed like we'd turn turtle. The judge was reading papers, not seeming to notice what was happening, so I said nothing until we careened over a log, and I cracked my head on the carriage top. Then I kicked. The judge grunted and put his head out the window, and roared at the driver,

" 'You scoundrel! You're drunk this morning!'

"Pat turned round to look at the judge. 'Be gorra, your Honor,' he said, 'and that's the first rightful decision ye've handed down for a year.' "

Lincoln burst into a great roar of laughter, and, a little hysterically, Seward joined him. But after a moment of this, the President pulled himself up, abruptly. "What was the unprecedented news, Seward?"

The Secretary of State sobered instantly. "I was waited on before my breakfast this morning by Justice Campbell of Alabama. I have told you of him and his business in Washington."

"His alleged business—" interpolated Lincoln. "Any federal judge who will use his high office to cloak his political intrigues has a streak of yellow in his hide."

"At least," replied Seward, "he's sincere in his desire to prevent war. Jefferson Davis has agreed to move the capital of the Confederacy to Charleston, and to make Governor Pickens Secretary of State, if he will give Davis and the commissioners two more months in which to establish the rebellion pacifically. He begs of us to hold Fox back until he, Campbell, can get down to Charleston, and make his offer to Pickens."

"How did he learn about Captain Fox?" asked Lincoln, in dismay.

"He says it's common talk," replied the ex-Governor. "What does that matter? You will give the necessary assurances to Campbell, will you not, sir?"

"Seward," replied the President, "I want to impress on you that private intrigues will never get the United States out of the trouble into which she's worked herself. I'll have nothing to do with Campbell and his machinations. I don't trust him, or any man of his ilk. My earnest advice to you is that you refuse to meet these fellows who wear gum shoes."

The godfather of the new Republican party bestowed on Lincoln a glance of injured dignity that gave way immediately to one of bewilderment.

"But what are we to do?"

"We'll relieve Sumter," replied Lincoln. "I sent a telegram to Fox at dawn, telling him to get going not later than the 6th of April."

Seward fell back against the great hall table. "You—you—you did that, sir?"

"I did that, sir," replied the President grimly. "God help me and this country."

"But you can undo the message. It's not too late!" eagerly, from the Secretary of State.

Lincoln stood for a moment, going back in his mind to his soul-gripping ordeal of the night. He still was smiling grimly, when he shook his head and repeated, "It is too late. You gather up the Cabinet about noon, Governor, and I'll have it out with them and you too."

Seward went from the room, with his head bowed on his breast. Lincoln would have gone directly to his office, but Mary caught him on the stairs, and prevailed on him to return to his unfinished breakfast.

He had formulated no very clear idea of how to win his Cabinet to support him in his decision. He followed, perhaps, the only method that could have brought them into even a half-hearted acquiescence. He made his statement, listened for an hour to their protests and vituperations, and when they had exhausted themselves, re-stated his unalterable purpose and left the room.

Taddie had come into the Cabinet room during the last of the discussion. Much to the annoyance of the Secretaries, he began to tease his father for a dollar, but he did not gain Lincoln's attention until the latter, white and spent, had made his way to the sitting room. Then Lincoln gave the child the money, and strode on to his bedroom. Tad ran to find his brother, asking Miss Ford, whom he met in the hall, for Willie's whereabouts.

"I'll tell you where Willie is, if you'll tell me where your father is," replied Miss Ford. "I have a message for him from your mother."

"You'd betta' not botha' Papa day," Tad shook his little head wisely. "He wouldn't hea' you if you yelled at him. He has one of his deaf spells on, that he gets when he has to do something he don't like."

"Mercy!" exclaimed Miss Ford. "I hope it's nothing he has to do to you or Willie or mother or me!"

"It's not! I was in the Cabinet meeting with him. Papa day has told some one to start with b'ead and meat fo' Ande'son, and they've been telling him he mustn't, and he says he al'eady has. So don't you botha' him."

"I won't!" Miss Ford pretended to shudder, to the child's great amusement. "Willie is in the garden," she said, and turned into her room.

The immediate events that followed the sending of the telegram to Captain Fox were, in a sense, anti-climax to Lincoln. In the vigils of his night of pacing, he had lived through all the shocks, the passions, the agonies that the Civil War could offer. He had foreseen, of course, that for a few days he would be terribly alone in his singleness of purpose. He was a good prophet.

He was obliged to use the most urgent measures to force General Scott into such active preparations for the impending struggle as could be made without authority from Congress. The treasury was bankrupt. There was no war feeling in the North. Commercial interests were entirely hostile to any action that would seem to coerce the seceding states; nothing must interrupt cotton trading. During the days that followed the sending of the telegram, Chase and Seward did not cease to harp on these conditions.

Lincoln remarked grimly that he believed patriotism was dead in the North; then he deliberately turned a deaf ear to their comments, and concentrated every effort of his mind on getting the relief fleet started toward Charleston harbor.

Slow as he was in some aspects of his executive work, General Scott surprised Lincoln by his activity in others. As soon as the President apprised him of the orders he had given to Fox, Scott organized an army Secret Service that began to function immediately. The first fruits of this Service was an intercepted telegram from Jefferson Davis to Justice Campbell. The message stated that Campbell's information regarding Captain Fox's orders having been received, Beauregard had been ordered to demand the evacuation of Fort Sumter by its commander, Major Anderson.

Lincoln read the telegram on the evening of April 8th, and again urged Fox to make all possible speed. But it was too late to save the fort. On the 12th of April, at 4:30 in the morning, the stillness was broken by the sound of a mortar shot from a Secession battery in Charleston harbor. The shell rose high against the starlit heavens, curved gently in its course, and burst over Fort Sumter.

CHAPTER VIII

"ON TO RICHMOND!"

IT was on Sunday afternoon, April 14th, that word reached the White House that Anderson had evacuated Fort Sumter. Lincoln had been enveigled into the garden by Mary, who was deeply concerned over his long work hours. All day, the White House had been thronged as though a public reception were in progress. The Lincolns escaped into the garden by passing through the basement kitchen.

Mary was scolding the President, when John Hay appeared in the offing.

"You'll break down, Abra'm. I talked to Dr. Stone about you yesterday. He's certain that you have a consumptive tendency. He says that I must force you to eat and sleep properly."

Lincoln laughed. "I reckon Dr. Stone is barking up the wrong tree, this time. Why, Mary, my whole backwoods life has been preparing me for just such strains as this. It will take something more than the siege of Sumter to break down these muscles. Look!"

He slipped his great hands under her arms and swung her into the air as he would swing Taddie. Mary shrieked, and struggled to hold down the great sails of her skirts.

"There's John Hay! Quick, Abra'm! Oh, you are disgusting! This is not a husking bee on the Sangamon!"

Lincoln set her down calmly, and turned to his secretary. "News from Sumter, John?"

"Yes, sir," handing the President a memorandum from General Scott.

Lincoln read it, but without the sinking of the heart which he had anticipated. He was fully prepared for the giving up of the fort.

"The next thing is to issue the call to arms we worked out this morning, John," he said. "We'll get right at it."

Mary turned white. "War! Is that what it means, Abra'm?"

He nodded and started toward the house, which he entered again by way of the basement.

Mary remained standing by a rose bush, trembling a little, and she was still standing there when, five minutes later, Miss Ford in a pale green moiré antique came quickly down the path.

"Fort Sumter has fallen, Mrs. Lincoln!" she exclaimed.

"Yes! My poor husband!" ejaculated Mary.

"Do you think it means war?" asked the Virginian, turning to pick a tulip, which she tucked into her chestnut curls.

"What else can it mean? Mr. Lincoln is not Mr. Buchanan, content to sit as if paralyzed, while the South robs the nation," cried Mary.

"He seemed so gentle," murmured Miss Ford.

"So he is, where his affections are concerned, or mere personal interest," replied Mary. "But in his patriotism, he's flint. That's where a great many people are misunderstanding him."

"But war!" drawled the other, trying the effect of another tulip in the draperies of her skirt. "Does he realize that if he brings on war, in three months' time he'll be taking you all back to Illinois, while Jefferson Davis sits in the White House?"

Mary's blue eyes flashed. "Don't talk nonsense, Miss Ford."

"I reckon three months from now it won't seem nonsense, unless you can use your influence on the President to hold his hand, and refuse to declare war."

"My influence!" Mary smiled. "You flatter me, my dear! I can influence his manners, I can rouse his ambition, I can sometimes make him change his opinions of people. But, in twenty years, I have never been able to get him to revise a moral decision, once made."

There was silence for a moment. Mary looked up at the white pile of the house. It had taken her many years to make herself mistress of that beautiful roof tree. It seemed that she was to rule in it only under the shadow of national tragedy. She sighed, and the Virginian echoed the sound.

"I was thinking, dear Madam President," she smiled ruefully, "that all our beautiful and elaborately laid plans will now go for nothing. You will be expected to give up all formal entertaining—if there is war. And that means that my usefulness to you is ended. You see, I'm selfish, after all."

"Nonsense!" cried Mary. "I'll need you more than ever! If these Southern women are nasty to me now, what will they be if Mr. Lincoln uses soldiers to put down the Secessionists! Certainly you can help me to make them see—" She suddenly paused, gave Miss Ford a keen look, and went on, "I'm just remembering that you are a Virginian and a slaveholder, and that you may feel that you cannot be loyal to me and to Virginia, too."

"I'm going to tell you quite cold bloodedly," said Miss Ford, with a lowering of her voice to confidential notes, "that all I want is my slaves. If no one takes them away from me, they can have their old Union or their cunning little brand new Confederacy or any other sort of idiotic political arrangement these grown up boys like to play with."

"Well, that is rather a cynical way to look at it." Mary's tone held an edge of disapproval. "But after all how else can an honest person look at slavery?" She was thoughtful for a moment. She liked Miss Ford, and admired her. Even in the scant three weeks she had known the Virginian she had grown to depend on her. The previous week at least a dozen members of the innermost Southern circle had attended her teas—women who if Miss Ford had not urged them, Mary knew, would never have consented to meet the wife of the Republican President.

"Don't go, Miss Ford," she exclaimed, with her sudden, charming smile. "I need your help and I need—your friendship."

A quick and unaccustomed flush touched the Virginian's oval face to exaggerated beauty. "Thank you, Madam President," she said. "I'll try to give you both. But"—hesitating—"if I come to you will you be able to give me frequent absences, without pay, of course. That poor plantation of ours needs more than my dear old father's attentions, now."

"Certainly, my dear, certainly," agreed Mary.

Miss Ford did not return to the house a moment later, when her employer did, but strolled slowly among the shrubs and trees that bordered the south lawn. Taylor met her there, just as the early spring dusk settled among the syringa bushes.

"I've been waiting a long hour, Lady," he said, lifting her fingers to his lips.

"I'm sorry, Tom, but I've only now learned what we wished to know. I am to stay on at the White House. The President is issuing a call for militia. Mrs. Lincoln or no one else can stop him. It's war, Tom. Pray God a short one."

"It's bound to be, with a military fool like Scott, and a backwoods orator like Lincoln attempting to meet

Beauregard and Davis," declared Taylor, squaring his fine shoulders as he spoke. "Davis owes me a commission, I reckon."

"Don't be too sure that Lincoln is only a backwoods politician," retorted Miss Ford. "Didn't Judge Campbell tell you about his reply to Seward?"

"Yes, he showed it to me. Astute, I'll admit, but legal astuteness doesn't necessarily make an efficient commander-in-chief of an army and navy. The folks in Montgomery nearly burst with laughter, when any one mentions Lincoln in that capacity."

"I don't much blame them." Miss Ford smiled as she spoke. "Nevertheless, he's no fool, and Mrs. Lincoln says herself that she can't influence him on matters of moral principle—so I'm about to undertake that job, myself!"

"You! What are you up to now, Lady?" peering at her through the dusk.

"If I can win the confidence of Charles Sumner, of Jefferson Davis, of William Seward, is there any reason why Abraham Lincoln can hold out against me?" She gave him a little green silk mantle which he adjusted over her shoulders. "And having won his confidence, I shall give him mine, and tell him to what men to give the job of running his absurd little war for him."

Taylor did not speak for a moment.

"Don't you approve?" demanded the Virginian.

"I'm going over in my mind the list of men who are proud to call themselves your friends," replied Taylor. "I'm sorry for Abraham! But—it's hateful work, Lady."

She tossed her head. "Oh, I laid my conscience away in rose leaves when I undertook this job. As a matter of fact, I can't see why it's worse to shoot a fellow citizen, as you plan to do, than to spy on him and use him, as I plan to do."

Taylor sighed. "Perhaps you're right. But I always shall hate it for you. When do you wish to see me again?"

"In a week, unless something urgent happens. Then I'll send Jinny to you. I must go in now, Tom."

"Oh, Lady, what is the hurry! Let's stroll and talk of something sweeter than war politics." He put a pleading hand on her arm.

She laughingly removed it. "I must go to watch my prey! Moreover, that dreadful river damp is rising. Dr. Stone says breathing that is what keeps typhoid going in Washington. Good night, Tom dear." And she was gone.

But, however concrete were her plans for becoming a close friend to Lincoln, she was able to execute none of them that night, or for many days and nights that followed. Quite literally, until he dropped exhausted into bed, the President never was alone. His call for 75,000 men for three months to re-possess the forts and places seized from the Union had broken the lethargy that had paralyzed the North. The country was roused to a fury of war enthusiasm as difficult to control and direct as had been its inertia. For the first two or three weeks after the fall of Fort Sumter, it seemed to Lincoln that he could never bring order out of the chaos. His days were frenzied, never free from the exhausting pressure of interviews, of the demands for his authority to be used in the thousand different matters he controlled as President and as Commander-in-Chief.

At this time Nicolay helped him more than any one else. The secretary had all the orderliness of habit that Lincoln lacked. Mary called her husband's attention to this several times, and, finally, one hot May morning, when Lincoln entered his office at seven in the morning to find it already packed with important personages, he fled to Nicolay's office.

"George," he pleaded, "I'm drowning! Can't you send me a raft?"

Nicolay looked up from the letters Stoddard was handing him, with hurried résumés of their contents.

"What's the trouble, Mr. Lincoln?"

"My room's so full of folks I can't reach my desk. Have I got to see all of them?"

"You should not see any of them, sir. But—"

Lincoln interrupted, "I reckon I've been a fool. Shoo them out for me, George. Fix it so I can scratch the back of my neck without opening the window for space to do it in."

"If you will permit Hay and Stoddard and myself to order your day for you, sir," Nicolay spoke with earnestness based on anxiety, "you will do better work for the country."

"Do it, boy, do it!" urged the President, with the sense of gratitude and relief he always experienced when Nicolay put a shoulder under his burdens.

His days went better after that, though he still found it infinitely difficult to deny himself to any one who wished to see him. But he was realizing more clearly every hour, that only by educating himself thoroughly in the theory of war, could he hope to place men fit to carry on the war, in places of responsibility. He could train himself only in solitude and this knowledge, quite as much as Nicolay's urging, helped him to tear himself away from his visitors, and to remain, for long hours, in his room with his war maps, his reports from the War and Navy departments, and his books on the military art.

He was at work thus, late one evening in May, seated before a huge map of the United States, hung on the wall opposite his head. On this map, with different colored pins, he had outlined General Scott's plan for the conduct of the war, which Lincoln had dubbed the "Anaconda."

It seemed to him that the General's basic theory was sound. Scott's idea was to envelop the seceding states with a cordon of military posts down the Ohio and the Mississippi, by a blockade of all ports on the Atlantic and the Gulf of Mexico, and by a military line, thrown from the Potomac to the Ohio.

Sound, thought Lincoln, as far as the military end went. Its weak side lay in the fact that it would take an enormous amount of time to develop military leaders and armies fitted to undertake the task. And time was exactly what the North would not grant the administration. Across the Potomac, on Arlington Heights, were encamped thirty thousand of the "three months' men," under General McDowell. They were as yet, with all the good will in the world, only what William Russell said of them—an untrained, unequipped rabble.

Yet Northern newspapers and politicians already were urging Lincoln to send to take Richmond McDowell's host, which they characterized as a "magnificent army of 100,000 men, fit to wipe the Rebels off the face of the earth."

Horace Greeley led the pack shrilly, with the slogan "On to Richmond!" and "On to Richmond!" echoed a million lesser voices.

It was of this slogan that Lincoln was thinking, shortly after midnight, when Mary came in, candle in hand.

"Bedtime, dear," she said. "Shall I read to you?"

He did not hear her.

"Abra'm, do answer me!" she begged.

It was not Mary's voice that reached his ears but Greeley's, insistent as a gadfly's. "On to Richmond!" Where, he asked himself, once more, was he to find a man who could make an army out of a mob in a few weeks' time? How long could he hold off the battle that

Greeley and his fellow politicians were forcing on him?

"You ought to go to bed, Abra'm!" Mary raised her voice. Her husband's capacity for concentration was undoubtedly a great intellectual asset to himself, but it was decidedly trying, at times, to other people. She pulled her wrapper more closely about her, and stood hesitating. Then in a still louder voice, she repeated, "You ought to go to bed, Abra'm!" and with this, she suddenly turned off the gas, leaving only the candle in her hand to light the room.

Lincoln, startled, raised his head. "That won't do, Mary. I can't see the map clearly."

"I don't mean you to," she retorted. "You must go to bed, or you will be ill."

The President sighed. If only he could make Mary understand that his great strength was in little danger of being impaired, that this was what he had to give to his country, the strength acquired during his laborious youth. He rose, and taking the candle from her hand, he lighted the gas from its flame.

"Go back to your bed, Mary dear. I've a hard nut to crack, to-night." He sat down, and carefully removed a green headed pin from Mobile to Cairo.

His face was ghastly with weariness, and, as she observed its deepened pallor, the fear that would not leave her, clutched Mary's heart again.

"I'm trying to keep you from galloping consumption!" she cried, her voice rising hysterically, "and you sit as if it were some childish mania of mine you were trying to thwart. You shall go to bed! Go, I tell you, go!"

She screamed the last words at him, at the same time raising her hand again toward the gas jet. But before she could carry out her purpose, the door into the hall, which had been left ajar, was pushed open, and Miss Ford rushed in.

"What's the matter! Shall I call the guard?"

Mary turned on her, furiously. "What do you mean by intruding in this room, madam?"

The Virginian wrapped the folds of her pale green peignoir more closely about her tall figure. "I'm very sorry, Mrs. Lincoln," she replied, frigidly. "I was reading in my room, and when I heard you scream, I thought some one was annoying you and the President, and that perhaps I could call the guard to eject the intruder."

"You remind me, Miss Ford," Lincoln's voice was urbane, "that I've meant all day to talk to you. Come in and sit down."

"Mr. Lincoln!" shrilled Mary. "Have you no sense at all? It's one o'clock, and Miss Ford is in her night clothes."

"Are those night clothes?" with a chuckle. "She's lots better covered than you were at supper, to-night, Mary."

"I can dress in a moment or two, sir," said Miss Ford gently, "if Mrs. Lincoln doesn't mind waiting for me."

"Please do wait until morning, Miss Ford," urged Mary, less stridently, but none the less urgently.

"Mary, you take that chair by my bed and tend to your knitting for a moment." Lincoln spoke in a tone of unmistakable authority and Mary obeyed him. He pushed forward a cushioned ottoman for Miss Ford. "What I have to say won't take long. I gather from what Charles Sumner told me about you, Miss Ford, that you didn't secede when the rest of Virginia did."

"No, Mr. President, I am pro-slavery, but I still belong to the Union."

"Then, I take it, you're in sympathy with this movement of the folks in the western part of Virginia around Wheeling, to set up housekeeping for themselves as a separate State?"

"Oh, decidedly in sympathy," replied Miss Ford.

Lincoln watched her. She looked extraordinarily intelligent, but he wondered if Sumner, talking to him about her discretion and high sense of honor, might not be mistaken. Yet this was only a vague surmise, one of those unreasoning intuitions he often got about men—seldom, if ever, about women. Perhaps he ought to have talked this over with Mary before broaching it to Miss Ford. Mary was the one who knew folks. But time pressed so unrelentingly!

"I want you to do for me an errand that a tactful woman can do better than a man," he said, "because she would be less observed. Sumner says you have relatives at Wheeling."

"Yes, Mr. President, a married brother," Miss Ford nodded, "a Union slaveholder, like my father and me."

"Good. Now, I have reason to believe that a very pretty counter-revolution is being planned by the Secessionists up around Wheeling. They're going to try to lick these western Virginians into the Confederacy. I want to know just how strong that movement is, and what chance it has for success. Will you go up for a visit to your brother, and find out for me?"

"Gladly!" exclaimed Miss Ford. "I'll start in the morning."

"I'll be much obliged to you." The President rose as he spoke. "You see Nicolay, and he'll get the money for you and arrange for your pay. And I'll give you a letter to General McClellan. He's a promising officer, heading up the Ohio three-months men."

"I know George McClellan, Mr. Lincoln!" exclaimed Miss Ford. "As a West Point cadet, he used to visit our plantation."

"Seward didn't exaggerate your wide acquaintanceship," smiled the President.

"You can spare me, can you not, Mrs. Lincoln?" asked Miss Ford.

"Why consult me!" exclaimed Mary, with a smile that did not entirely counteract the bitterness in voice and eye.

Lincoln turned to her apologetically, and Miss Ford made her escape from the room.

"You don't really mind me picking up whatever tool comes to hand, Mary? I hadn't time—"

His wife interrupted with an hysterical laugh. The strain of the past two months had brought her to the breaking point, and this appeared to be the proverbial last straw.

"Mind! Mind! Who am I to mind? A lay-figure called the Mistress of the White House! You don't condescend to speak to me once in a week. You ignore my presence and now, without bothering to consult me, you take my one companion, the one person who—"

Lincoln took a step toward the door. "I'll recall the mission, Mary. I'm so sorry you take it this way."

"Come back!" cried Mary, bursting into tears. "Do you want her to think I'm jealous—? Can't you be anything but dense in your conception of me and my needs?"

For five minutes, she lashed him with all the fury of her hysterical temper.

Lincoln did not speak. Sometimes her hysteria wore itself out, and ended in contrition as unreasoning as her temper. But not to-night. He watched her,—sadly,—realizing as he did so, that the hostility of Washington, the vile innuendoes against her character that were finding their way into newspapers were biting deeper into her sensitive soul than he had thought.

At last he crossed to her side, put his arm around her shoulders, and placed his great hand gently over her mouth. She struggled to free herself, but not until she had become quite still did he release her. Then she fled with a sob to her own room.

Very slowly he placed Halleck back on the table near the head of the bed, and prepared himself for rest. He lighted the candle on the night stand, got into bed, and opened his Bible. These outbursts of Mary's upset him.

Lincoln read slowly through several of the Psalms, then closed the book, and lay staring at the bedpost. He was thinking, not about the war, not about slavery, or the friction in his Cabinet. He was thinking about Mary. No one of all the human beings that he knew, he told himself, had finer possibilities than his wife, or less chance for happiness.

All her generosity of spirit, all her brilliancy of mind, all her managing ability, must be blocked continually by her inability to control her tongue.

He sighed deeply and closed his eyes. As he did so the door from Mary's room opened, and his wife flung herself on her knees by his bedside, and laid her forehead on his hand.

"Oh, Abra'm! Abra'm! Forgive me, for I can't forgive myself!"

He raised himself on his elbow and kissed the back of her bowed head.

"I'm not much good to you, wife," he said humbly. "There's nothing for me to forgive. It's only yourself you harm. I was just lying here, thinking that, and how, if you repeat to-night's tantrums in front of folks, all the Miss Fords in the world can't help you to off-set the gossip."

Mary raised her tear-stained face. She had been thinking only of her relation to her husband. "What do I care about that—" she began impetuously.

Lincoln touched her lip with a forefinger. "There it goes again, that tongue you can't break to harness! You care about it a whole lot, just as I care about it for you."

Mary swallowed a great sob. "Yes, I care," she admitted, "but it has no importance at all, in comparison with what I care for your admiration. I want your love! Oh, Abra'm!—and little by little, I'm killing it."

"Pshaw!" exclaimed Lincoln. "You talk as if I didn't know all about folks, and what to expect of 'em, even women!" His white teeth gleamed for a moment, then he added, sadly, "Can't I help you, somehow, to get a grip on yourself?"

"You help me every day of your life by the example of your patience." Mary clasped his great hand with both her own and laid her cheek against it.

The gesture was so like Taddie's in his moments of remorse, she was so like a child, huddled in her pink wrapper at the bedside, shivering from spent nerves, that her husband's eyes filled with tears. With a sudden movement of his powerful body he lifted her, and gathered her warmly in his arms.

"Poor girl!" he murmured. "Poor Mary! I reckon they couldn't have chosen two folks with stronger weaknesses than you and me for this job! It'll take more than Miss Ford and Seward to pull us through. Guess the Almighty will have to keep us on His mind most of the time."

"I know He will you!" whispered Mary, brokenly, "*I* don't matter."

CHAPTER IX

MASSA LINCUM'S NIGGER

THINKING the matter over, as she journeyed from Washington to Wheeling, Miss Ford decided that this errand was devised in Heaven to give her the much sought opportunity to win the President's confidence. She believed herself to be only one of several acquaintances that Lincoln was employing in this same search for news. It was possible, she told herself, that he was testing her, was planning bigger work for her, and would have her watched while in Wheeling. It behooved her, then, to act with complete honesty toward him, to conduct herself, until the errand was completed, consistently as a friend he was justified in trusting. She made a wry face at herself as she realized that she had reached this conclusion with a keen sense of satisfaction.

"Either I'm not a born spy," she told herself as she watched the beautiful Staunton turnpike corkscrew through the hills ahead of the station wagon Uncle Ben was driving for her, "or else I'm beginning to have a vague sympathy for that mis-placed, ugly rail-splitter."

She was still complacent when she returned to Washington a week later. She walked firmly past the protesting Billy Stoddard into the President's office.

Lincoln was deep in a conversation with William Russell on England's frank partiality toward the Confederacy. He was so keenly interested in the Englishman's explanation of the British ideals of diplomacy that, for a moment, as the tall woman in her flowing draperies appeared suddenly at his desk, he wondered what she wanted of him. Then, with an effort, he returned to his anxieties regarding western Virginia, and jumping to his feet he exclaimed,

"Did you bring home the bacon?"

"I hope so," she replied, shaking hands first with the President, then with the war correspondent.

Russell excused himself at once, and Miss Ford, sinking into his chair, untied the strings of her green bonnet, and smiled at Lincoln. She then proceeded to give him a succinct account of the Union organization existing in most of the counties lying between the Allegheny and the Ohio rivers. She showed him that Confederate recruiting officers were making very little headway in these counties, while Union recruiting was highly successful.

"If," she ended, "you will order General McClellan, as the Wheeling Unionists have asked you, to send armed regiments of the Ohio militia up to Wheeling, the moral effect of that move will undoubtedly crystallize the new State into being."

"That's been my impression," commented Lincoln. "Your report presents real evidence, which is what I lacked. I'm greatly obliged to you, Miss Ford. Did you hear much about McClellan up that way?"

"He's on everybody's lips," replied Miss Ford. "He has a remarkable personality. He's done little so far, yet you feel his presence very keenly. I think he's going to be a great military leader, Mr. Lincoln."

"I hope he will be!" Lincoln's voice was hearty. His judgment had not been at fault. Tested by other reports, the Virginian had done an accurate job, and had talked with more people than his three other investigators put together. He was glad on two counts, first, to have fairly conclusively proved to him that an important portion of Virginia could be saved to the Union, second, that this woman for whom Mary and the boys had such a liking was proving herself loyal,—loyal and intelligent enough, he thought, to be sent, a little later, to Kentucky, to help beguile that wavering State into remaining with the Union.

"You've done a good job. I'm going to give you a bigger and harder one, next time," he showed his white teeth in an approving smile.

"I'm so glad! What is it?" exclaimed Miss Ford, leaning one elbow on his desk, and returning his smile.

"I can't tell you that in one sitting. You've got to be educated piecemeal to it. You watch your chance, and when you can, buttonhole me, look me in the eye, and say 'Kentucky' to me. I'll tell you all I can at that particular moment."

The Virginian laughed as she rose. "What fun! I begin to feel as important as I'm sure Secretary Seward does with all his little mysteries."

Lincoln drew a pile of letters toward him and began to sign them. "I dare you to tell Seward that," he chuckled.

"I dare!" she cried, as she left him.

Had Lincoln not been absorbed most of the twenty-four hours in looking for light to lead himself and the country through the military chaos, the national bankruptcy, the foreign and domestic insolences, that now submerged the unhappy Union, he might have been struck by the number of times a day he was exchanging a few moments of conversation with the Virginian.

When he thought of Kentucky, he was conscious of the fact that one of his many plans for helping the Blue Grass State was progressing well, but, outside of that, Miss Ford did not actually catch his full attention again until the latter part of June.

One beautiful afternoon, at this time, accompanied by John Hay and William Russell, the British war correspondent, Lincoln descended the steps under the north portico to enter his carriage. He was going to visit McDowell's camp across the river.

"John, you'll ride backward, being young and easy to impose on, and I'll—" The President stopped abruptly as he roused from his concentration on his companions. Mary and Miss Ford were seated in the barouche.

"We, too, wish to inspect the famous Army of the Potomac!" exclaimed Mary, with a smile.

"Some one will have to stay at home," drawled Miss Ford.

"I reckon it can't be any one of the masculine persuasion," returned Lincoln. "You ladies are very ornamental, but Russell and Hay are useful on an expedition like this."

"I can sit with the driver," suggested John Hay, with his usual tact. "Mr. Russell's too big from every angle—"

Russell smiled. Lincoln's lips were a little grim. He didn't want the women along, but neither did he want to risk a temper fit on Mary's part. He stood with one foot on the step, addressing himself to Miss Ford.

"You know," he said, "I've got to take a look at McDowell's troubles. And I can't do it riding backward, or chatting with beautiful ladies. If you and my wife insist on going, I'll have to ask you to allow Russell and me to use the seat you're in now, and you'll have to be inconvenienced by riding backward."

"Mr. President!" protested Russell, "I'll get my horse!"

"You'll do nothing of the sort. I need your ear and eye close at hand," said the President.

"My dear Mr. Lincoln," exclaimed Miss Ford, gracefully moving to the opposite seat, and arranging the silk dust coat that covered her crinoline, "so long as you don't send us back to our rooms, as we should be sent, we're glad to sit anywhere, even postilion fashion. We knew we risked that, didn't we, Mrs. Lincoln?"

Mary's eyes twinkled as she crowded her billowy skirts and dust coat in beside the Virginian's. "He'd better be thankful we didn't bring the boys."

"And the pups!" added John Hay.

The President chuckled as he doubled his long body on the rear seat.

The carriage passed rapidly down the dusty road toward Long Bridge, past the fields in which were piled the stones for completing the Washington monument, past squalid cottages beyond which lay a fine view of the richly wooded Virginia shore, to the ancient wood and brick structure, part causeway and part drawbridge which spanned the Potomac, here a mile wide.

A sentry sitting on a stump, at the bridgehead, his gun in his lap, was reading a newspaper. He looked up as the carriage halted.

"Where do you folks think you're going?" he demanded, without rising.

"Keep quiet, John," said the President, as he saw his young secretary's profile turn purple. "I'm Mr. Lincoln," turning to the sentry. "I'm going to call on General McDowell."

"Yes, I knowed it was you, Mr. Lincoln, by your picture, but I don't know all the folks with you."

"I have a pass from General Scott." Russell gravely produced the document.

"So have I!" John's sense of humor was returning.

"How about the women folks?" demanded the sentry. "They make more trouble than the men."

"Don't they!" agreed Lincoln, genially. "Well, these ladies have passes, I suppose. At least I found 'em in my carriage and they refused to be turned out, so I suppose they're all equipped for the trip."

"Mr. Lincoln!" exclaimed Mary. She leaned forward to smile at the sentry. "I'm Mrs. Lincoln, and this is my friend, Miss Ford."

Russell moved uneasily. The President chuckled.

"Might as well get used to our lack of pomp, Russell! It'll take us a long time to stiffen our backs to carrying war weapons."

"Can't help it, ma'am, if you ain't got passes, you can't cross," declared the sentry.

"Mr. Lincoln, fix it for us!" implored Mary. "You've punished us enough for our presumption."

Still chuckling, the President produced two cards, scribbled on them with pencil, and Mary showed them to the sentry, who nodded grudgingly, and, at a word from John Hay, the driver started the horses across the bridge.

The soldiers on duty at the other end nodded informally at the President, and permitted the barouche to pass without stopping. The party immediately entered a maze of camps scattered among the magnificent trees that lined the shore to the crest of Arlington Heights, a mile or so beyond. The horses trotted smartly along the road to Arlington House, formerly the home of the Confederate, General Lee, but now confiscated by the Union, and in use as McDowell's headquarters.

They wound through the beautiful park that surrounded the mansion, to the carriage porch. An orderly led them through the wide hall to the great portico in front, with its wide and lovely view of the Potomac and the city.

A group of officers hastily left a map-covered table at the far edge of the porch, and, led by McDowell, a stocky, bearded man, came forward to greet the President and his party. At Lincoln's suggestion, two of the officers took the ladies off for a look at the house and grounds. As the crinolines undulated away under tiny sunshades, he turned to McDowell.

"Well, General, when do we have that battle?"

McDowell smiled ruefully. "What has Horace Greeley decided, sir?"

"Immediately, General! This exact moment! I reckon that this perfect army of yours,—by the way, it's not possible that those several thousand un-uniformed and otherwise fellows we saw drilling in squads on our way up here are an essential part of the fighting force?" Lincoln's smile was more rueful than the officer's.

"They *are* the fighting force, sir!" replied McDowell.

There was a moment's silence, during which Lincoln stared across the shimmering blue Potomac. John Hay looked at Russell, whose military opinion he respected even more than he did the war correspondent's literary ability. Russell, leaning against a white pillar, with arms folded across his broad chest, eyed a shambling soldier who, in a rumpled and dirty uniform, and with still dirtier accouterments, was doing guard duty on the terrace before the house.

"Let's see if my information is correct," said Lincoln, finally. "You have about thirty thousand men, and the Confederates have an equal number. A good part of your military is made up of three months' men, whose time is about expired. Thirty miles south of here, the Confederates have thrown up heavy batteries—near Manassas. How are their lines disposed near here, and how can you best reach them?"

"I don't know, sir," replied McDowell, "for certain. There is no such thing procurable as a decent map of Virginia. I can be sure only of the direction of the main roads. I can get no geographical information because the enemy is in full force along my front, and I have no cavalry officer capable of conducting a reconnaissance through the dense woods."

"Yet our constituents must have a battle, they say," murmured Lincoln.

McDowell's gray eyes snapped with sudden fury. "Damn the politicians!" he said. "They'll wreck us before we begin."

John Hay flushed. "War and politics, campaigns and statecraft," he exclaimed, "are Siamese twins."

"So you see, General, I am of some importance, even to the military," smiled the President. "You must remember this, that the enemy is in no better shape than yourself."

"But nothing decisive is to be gained by such an engagement, sir," pleaded McDowell. "General Scott agrees as to that. By fall we'll be in shape to give decisive battle."

"I know! I know!" murmured Lincoln. He took a turn or two round the table, unbuttoned his vest and tightened his suspender strap, buttoned the vest, then stood absolutely motionless, one hand on William Russell's broad shoulder, while he gazed unseeingly at the Potomac. Some day, he thought, he'd look at this view when his mind was not overwhelmed with responsibility.

"Is there anything I can do for you, in particular, General?" he finally asked.

"Hold that battle off until we at least have some sort of transportation for our ammunition, Mr. President," replied McDowell with a grim little smile. "What is it?" as an orderly approached and saluted.

"A rebel officer, General, under a flag of truce, wishes to give a letter to the President."

McDowell glanced inquiringly at Lincoln who nodded.

"Bring him up," ordered the General.

From the trees to the left emerged a tall, gray figure, with a figure in blue on either side. As the trio moved toward headquarters, Mary and Miss Ford, each on the arm of an officer, crossed the terrace from the right front. Midway just before the portico the two parties met.

"Oh! Oh!" cried Miss Ford, dropping her escort's arm. "It's Tom Taylor! My dear Tom!" flying toward the Confederate officer and clasping his hand in both of hers. "What has happened! Don't tell me you are a prisoner!"

"Why, howdy, Lady Ford!" drawled Captain Taylor. "Don't tell me you're consorting with the Yankees!"

"Ah, but such wonderful Yankees!" smiled Miss Ford, turning to introduce Mary, to find, however, that Mary had withdrawn behind her husband. As if greatly confused, the Virginian fled to Mary's side.

Captain Taylor saluted the President. "I have the honor, sir, to request that you receive a letter from His Excellency, Jefferson Davis, President of the Confederacy."

Lincoln looked down into the man's handsome, half insolent eyes.

"Did you come far with that letter, Captain Taylor?" he asked.

"I came from President Davis, sir," replied Taylor, promptly.

"Quite some distance," said Lincoln, gently. "Too bad for you to have had so much trouble for nothing."

The Confederate flushed. "How am I to understand that, sir?"

"As a refusal to receive your letter." Then, with a sudden feeling of bitterness, Lincoln added, "How can you so insult my high office, Taylor, as to ask me to receive a message from a man presuming what Davis has presumed? Has he not insulted his flag enough but he must add this affront?" Lincoln turned on his heel. "Time we were heading for home," he said, calmly. "Have you and my wife satisfied your curiosity, Miss Ford."

"Entirely, sir," replied the Virginian.

"How about you, Russell?" turning to the Englishman. "Are there any questions you'd like to ask the General that he can properly answer?"

McDowell raised his eyebrows. "I don't know anything about Mr. Russell's sense of propriety, Mr. President, so there is nothing personal in my remark, that if he possesses one he's unique among the reporters in the United States."

The Englishman laughed. "After all, General, I fancy your reporters are controlled by the law of demand."

"I'm afraid that's true," agreed McDowell. "What can I do for you, sir?"

"May I ask for permission to study the methods of your drill officers? I am keenly interested in the study of citizen soldiery."

McDowell thought for a moment before he replied, "Come here to headquarters, Mr. Russell, whenever you have time for such study, and I'll see what I can do to accommodate you. I'm going to suggest, sir," turning to the President, "that you permit the ladies to drive on slowly in your carriage, while you gentlemen accompany me in an inspection of the camp."

"Oh, but we wish to see the camp too, do we not, Mrs. Lincoln?" cried Miss Ford.

"Certainly we do!" agreed Mary, taking her husband's arm.

"All right! Lead ahead, McDowell!" Then, as they followed the General around the mansion, and entered a company street, among the trees to the east, he looked back with a smile to Miss Ford, who was walking between John Hay and Russell. "I suspect you of wanting to look over the darkies we saw as we drove up. What is it Butler has named the runaway niggers down at Fortress Monroe?—contraband of war. Let us hope these are not contrabands, General."

"I'm asking them no awkward questions, Mr. President," replied McDowell, falling back beside Mrs. Lincoln. "They are very useful around the camp, I assure you. See those fellows cleaning up underbrush?" The group paused to watch several negroes at work with axes behind a line of tents.

"What is the difference between the contraband and stolen property!" asked Miss Ford, indignantly.

"Depends on where you are, I reckon," replied Lincoln. "Around here, I'm insisting that the Fugitive Slave Law be enforced, and all slaves be returned to their masters—if their masters call for 'em. You back me in that, don't you, General?"

"Certainly, sir. There was an owner came here this morning and got back three of his slaves. Name of Ford, Sylvester Ford. Perhaps a relation of yours, madam?" smiling at the Virginian.

She did not smile. Instead she lifted her handsome head angrily. "My father, sir. I hope he had no trouble with the black fools."

"None in particular. An Uncle Tom's cabin touch, that was all. Niggers weeping, overseer cursing, owner with knitted brows."

Lincoln looked at the Virginian with astonishment. The entire expression of her face had changed. She looked like a handsome termagant.

"Touching their slaves," he thought, "is to set loose a secret poison in them."

"Must have been a scalding comedy," sneered Miss Ford. "A hard fate, indeed, for them to leave this crude camp for the comforts of my father's plantation! My heavens!" suddenly pointing a graceful hand toward a young negro who came out of a near-by tent, with a gun he was polishing. "There's another of our niggers. Zeb, come here!"

The negro, a stalwart young fellow in faded cotton pants and a new red army shirt, was cleaning a gun. He grinned widely, and shook his head.

"Can't order me no more, little Miss! I'se a Lincum nigger now. I'se in a Lincum camp. I'se white, all but ma cola!"

Curiously enough, no one laughed. By this time, the audience was large, and the street was thronged with listening soldiers. The July sun burned through the shade of the giant sycamores. There was no wind. The shrilling of locusts rose even above the noises of the camp. Miss Ford, in her yellow frock and cloak, her little yellow hat lying coquettishly on the mass of her chestnut curls, was a brilliant and intensely feminine figure despite her extreme height.

"Come here, Zeb!" she repeated.

Zeb put one great hand against the pale trunk of a sycamore, as if he needed its well-rooted support.

"I ain't going back to the plantation no mo', little Miss! They got Nap and Courty and Mattie this morning. But I'se no field hand. I learned to read and write from old Miss. I was her body servant. I makes claim to my rights. I'se a Lincum nigger." This with a flash of his eyes toward the President.

Lincoln stood in characteristic attitude, hands clasped behind him, head thrust forward. Something in the young negro's words and pose,—that huge, finely shaped black hand clinging to the tree,—moved him unbearably. He could conduct himself with perfect logic and consistency, he thought, on this fugitive slave question, so long as he did not actually see a fugitive! A Lincoln nigger! It was a new phrase to the President and stirred him profoundly.

Miss Ford turned abruptly to Lincoln.

"Will you kindly exercise your authority, sir?"

General McDowell interrupted hastily. "It's neither necessary nor proper for you to appeal to the Chief Executive in these circumstances, Madam. If you wish to take the negro away with you, I'll see that he moves."

"Massa Lincum! Massa Lincum!" cried Zeb. "Tell 'em not to tech me; I ain't going back to slavery. Nebba, Massa Lincum." The darkey's beautiful, mellow voice was incredibly appealing.

The President looked down at the Virginian. Her eyes were black with that strange not-to-be-controlled passion, which he had observed to obsess all slaveholders, when their authority over the blacks was impugned or questioned.

"Will you sell this darkey, Miss Ford?" he asked, miserably, "I can get some one to buy him and set him free."

"Abra'm; Abra'm!" murmured Mary but no one heard her.

"He's not for sale!" replied the Virginian. "Will you give the necessary orders, General?"

"Massa Lincum!" pleaded Zeb.

The President's lips quivered and he gave a great sigh. "Zeb," he said, his voice rising clearly—"I reckon you'll have to go back, boy, while we fight this thing out."

"Ain't never going back!" reiterated Zeb. "If I can't be a Lincum nigger, I'll jes go up along to Mass' Jesus." And with overwhelming suddenness he put his mouth over the barrel of the gun he'd been polishing, touched the trigger with his bare toe, and blew off the top of his head.

Russell and McDowell prevented Lincoln by force from running to help pick up what was left of Zeb. For a few moments, after he had reached the barouche, whither McDowell hastened the party, the President said nothing. Then he looked at Miss Ford, sitting opposite him, still with that look of the termagant in her violet eyes.

"That is reality! While we play with words, Zeb gives us truth. I don't see how God Almighty can forgive us."

"Only a fool Yankee would put arms in the hands of a nigger, in the present state of things," declared the Virginian. Then with a curious note of triumph in her voice, she added, "You'd better take it, Mr. President, as a warning from the Almighty that you will be playing with all the fires of hell, if you allow your struggle to preserve the Union to touch slavery."

Lincoln looked at her curiously. "Have you no regrets, Miss Ford, for having driven a human being to suicide?"

"I regret losing a thousand dollars' worth of nigger," retorted the Virginian.

"Oh, my dear Miss Ford!" protested Mary. "I'm a native of a slave State but really, one oughtn't to speak so of the slaves! That tone is what feeds the fury of the Abolitionists."

Miss Ford's face softened as she looked down at the pale-faced little lady at her side. "I reckon I do sound too brutal for good manners," she said, "but you must admit, Madam President, that I've never made any attempt to deceive you on my feeling about slavery. Come! Why let the incident spoil a lovely afternoon? Mr. Russell, say something enlivening for the ladies and gentlemen!"

The Englishman who had witnessed the tragedy and listened to the conversation following, with most intense interest, responded at once. "I cannot say that something enlivening occurs to me, at the moment. I am wondering how the Secession party can hope to secede, on the plea that it must have the right to keep slaves if it wishes, and, at the same time, keep the slavery issue out of the war which it is waging, to make that secession good."

"Of course, it can't be done!" declared Lincoln.

Miss Ford gave him a quick glance, but before she could speak, John Hay made an effort to turn the subject. "That was quite a coincidence, Miss Ford, your meeting an old friend on the terrace of Arlington House! Are many Southerners as heavily friended as you?"

The Virginian showed her dimples. "There is an opportunity for you to turn one of your neat compliments, Mr. Hay, but I won't press you! As a matter of fact, the larger slaveholders of the South do have a very broad acquaintanceship among themselves, much like that which obtains among the landed aristocracy, perhaps I might say the feudal aristocracy, of England."

"Nothing small or American about your Southern estimation of yourselves, eh?" chuckled young Hay.

Miss Ford turned to Russell. "You had an exceptional opportunity to observe the South at its best, on your recent trip, sir. You visited our finest families, our most extensive plantations. Do I overestimate our right to claim aristocratic kinship with the British?"

Lincoln looked with amused eyes at the Englishman. Russell's urbanity, however, was unshaken. "Their hospitality robbed me of power or desire to judge them, Miss Ford. I was prepossessed, like most of my countrymen, in their favor, before I began my tour."

"And what of your prepossession after the tour—?" asked the Virginian, eagerly.

"In spite of it," replied Russell with a slight deepening of the voice, "I came away with the conviction that human slavery is essentially wrong."

"If slavery is not wrong, nothing is wrong!" exclaimed Lincoln.

Miss Ford threw up both her hands. "But we are no longer discussing slavery!" she protested.

"You asked for my opinion of your Southern aristocracy," said Russell, "an aristocracy built on slave labor. How can we fail to consider slavery in expressing an opinion of it?"

"You are a Northern sympathizer!" ejaculated Miss Ford.

"I am a neutral," replied Russell, "and sincerely so. But I'm going to free my mind of this statement, in questionable taste though it may be. This war will never end, until the slavery issue enters and is fought to a conclusion. Until North and South faces that fact squarely, both are showing themselves to Europe as afraid to face the results of their own political policies."

"Right!" shouted Lincoln, so fiercely that the horses plunged, "and I am the biggest coward of us all!"

He sank back in the carriage, his head on his breast, and there was that in his silence which held his companions quiet until the ride was finished.

CHAPTER X

THE FLAG RAISING

PERHAPS poor Zeb, himself, would have been reconciled to leaving a life which had brought him so little joy, had he known the effect his suicide was to have on "Massa Lincum."

The press of duties absorbed the President after the return from Arlington until midnight. But when he at last won to the quiet of his bedroom, he dropped into his chair by the window and entered into one of those long wrestling matches of the spirit that were the milestones of his magnificent, but eminently human, growth through the war.

He began by reproaching himself for not pressing his offer to buy Zeb, feeble as that remedy for a nasty situation had been. Then he grunted in disgust as he told himself that the offer was typical of his own softness. Was that softness affecting his stand on slavery in general? He could not answer that query, but, after a moment, he told himself that his sentimentality, his horror of others' suffering, was effecting his stand on the conduct of the war.

The North, clamoring for battle, could be made to understand how stupid were its demands only by witnessing the disaster sure to follow a premature action. Zeb's method! Could he use it? Could he allow Greeley and his screaming fellows to egg on McDowell and himself to send the army to certain and bloody failure?

And, from every point of view, was not failure at this time best? Early triumphs would not end the war, as Russell had said, because they would not settle the slavery issue— Defeat on defeat for the North, humiliation on humiliation, loss on loss, until the saving of the Union became all too meager a cause—that would be the moment to suggest that ultimate abolishment of slavery alone could justify the dreadful carnage—

Toward dawn, some one took his hand. He raised his head for a moment to smile at Mary, then dropped it again, though he clung to her warm, firm, little fingers.

Dawn gave way to sunlight. Flies buzzed on the ceiling. Doors slammed. The boys took their dogs into the garden. Voices sounded in Mary's room, then subsided. A little later, Miss Ford spoke from the hall, in her peculiarly clear drawl.

"Mrs. Lincoln, may I not send you all in some breakfast?"

"Don't bother just now, Miss Ford. I'll be out soon."

Ordinarily, Mary's voice alone had power to pierce through one of Lincoln's black fogs. But as the Virginian's slow tones penetrated through the door, he heard them.

"Just the same tones that said 'Zeb, come here!' " he exclaimed. "Mary, what's the matter with that woman?"

"She owns many slaves. All her property is in slaves," replied Mary.

"I was beginning to like and admire her," he murmured.

"She was very unpleasant yesterday, but still, I can't help liking her," Mary nodded her head. "And I can't say your absurd offer to buy the nigger impressed me as admirable. You weren't exactly a brilliant spectacle as Chief Executive, yesterday, Abra'm."

"I reckon I was at my least brilliant point when I let you two women intrude yourselves in the party." Lincoln sat erect with a sigh. "I wonder if her meeting Taylor there wasn't a little too pat?—Still, I don't quite see—"

Mary interrupted. "Oh, she's no spy! Don't let her peculiarities as a slaveholder inoculate you with spy fever, Abra'm!"

"Oh, very well!" sighed Lincoln, too weary for argument. "Somehow I don't feel very brisk, this morning."

"Humph! Strange!" snapped Mary. "You ate practically no supper last night. No food since yesterday noon. No sleep last night. I have a devil's temper, Abra'm, but you have the habits of an imbecile." Very gently, she began to undo his tie and collar. "Let's get some clean things on you, dear, before your breakfast."

Lincoln caught her fingers, kissed them and rose. "I've got to send a message to the war office, right off."

Tie trailing, collar unbuttoned, he strode out of the room.

Two hours later, McDowell received his orders to move his ill-trained, badly equipped army toward Manassas Junction.

Perhaps nothing was so typical of Washington, those summer days, as dust. It rolled in clouds up and down Pennsylvania Avenue, which, as a favorite route for marching troops, had been ground, knee deep, into powder. It turned the red, white and blue that draped the shops and boarding houses of the main thoroughfare to a universal gray. It obscured the foliage of the young trees struggling for existence at the curb, and it rolled in ceaseless fog-like waves over the White House gardens, where Mary loved to work in the early morning. Even the fountain below the south portico, despite the earnest efforts of the gardener, sprayed mud into a basin of mud.

The day after the visit to Arlington Heights was a Saturday, and the weekly concert of the United States Marine Band in the White House grounds was due. Mary had planned on this day to move the family out to the cottage at the Soldiers' Home, which Buchanan had used as a summer residence. But, unexpectedly, a flag-raising was scheduled at the close of the concert, at which she and the President were obliged to be present. She was tired after the night of strain, and would be doubly so after the afternoon's ceremonies, so she decided to postpone the migration until the following week.

Miss Ford had begged off sitting on the dais, erected below the south portico for the ceremonies. The dust, she said, was too thick for her patriotism. She was going to spend the afternoon in a much needed beauty sleep. When therefore, Willie found her, late in the afternoon, seated with a tall, blue-eyed man in the shade of a clump of ailanthus trees, that observing youth chided her frankly for her seeming deception.

"It was too hot in my room," she explained smilingly.

"Thought you hated dust," he said, disengaging his lips from a pop bottle. "And you're right where it and the folks are thickest," looking with distaste at the close packed crowds milling over the lawns. "Soldiers and crinolines, crinolines and soldiers," he muttered. "Gosh, they crowd everything! Going to get closer to see my father raise the flag?"

"Willie," Miss Ford caught his grubby hand languidly, "you look very nice in that brown linen suit."

"It's meant to be white, you know!" grinned Willie.

Miss Ford returned the smile. "This is a very old friend of mine, and I want you to go fetch Pensacola and Sumter for him to see. He gave me the mother of the pups."

"All right! Reckon I'll have to make Tad help me."

When the boy had disappeared, the Virginian turned to the man, who had been eyeing him keenly:

"His father must have been exactly like him at his age, though bigger and more awkward, Tom," she said.

"His father wasn't ever as clever as that lad, Lady Ford," said Taylor.

"Not so clever I agree. That's the mother in Willie, But Lincoln must have been far more intelligent. That's where Jeff Davis and his crowd are making their mistake, Tom. That's where I made my mistake, when I agreed to the present campaign."

The man dusted off his linen trousers with his broad brimmed straw hat, and listened for a moment to the band. "Invitation to the Dance," he murmured. "Wish we had that music at the plantation, with only you and me to dance to it. Had any new evidence of his intellectual prowess, Lady?"

"Yes, Tom, I have. In the first place, after fumbling for a short time, he's become master and overseer, both, of this plantation. Seward takes orders like a lamb. Cameron mutters, but under his breath, and does what he's told. Chase is nasty, but he's left off his patronizing manner." She paused and laughed reminiscently. "The family sitting room is sort of an overflow office, and Lincoln pays no more attention to the presence of the children or Mrs. Lincoln or myself than to so many chairs. Sometimes it annoys strange callers, but the 'regulars' are now as indifferent as he. Two or three nights ago I was sitting in the twilight, waiting for Mrs. Lincoln and the boys to get ready for the theater.

"Lincoln came in without seeing me, threw himself down in a chair, unbuttoned his vest, put his feet on the mantel, and groaned as if he were weary beyond words. A second after, the door from his office burst open, and a huge, bald-headed man half sidled, half loped into the room. He looked about until he caught sight of the President. Then he shouted, 'See here, Lincoln, we've got to finish, so's I can get back to New York. More light! Must have more light!' He lighted the gas and shuffled over to the President and stood by his chair as if he wanted to bite him.

"The President showed those nice white teeth of his. They always surprise me so in his sallow face. 'Greeley,' he said, 'why don't you read Artemus Ward when your nerves get bad'?

"Greeley,—yes, that's who it was—was furious. 'Have you no sense of decency?' he shrieked.

" 'I never asked myself that,' said Lincoln and you should have seen his gray eyes twinkle. 'But at least, I've never followed you into the privacy of your sitting room to tell you how little you know.'

"Greeley stuck out his lower lip like a child that's had its hands smacked. But the President didn't seem to notice. He went right on with what he had to say. 'Didn't it ever strike you as interesting, Greeley, that a couple of pretty poor sticks like you and me should have reached positions of such power? Came up from about the same conditions, both of us from poor folks, starved for an education, both of us,—sort of pulled ourselves up by our boot straps. Never'll lose the marks of the fight, either of us. No manners, no enjoyment of lots of the fine things better educated folks admire. But here we are, trying to lead millions of people who've been better trained than either of us. Reckon we're tarred with the same stick, Greeley. Now you go home to the *Tribune* and try to get off my back long enough for me to try to get far enough ahead of the people so's they won't trample me to death!'

"Well, do you know, Tom, Greeley stood there bursting to talk, and he didn't dare do so! He gasped and puffed, and he turned round, and went out of the room without a word."

Tom chuckled, then said, thoughtfully, "Common sense, Lady, but not what I've been raised to call intellectuality. What happened next? Did the old boy see you? Aren't getting a little sentimental about the log splitter, are you, my dear?"

Miss Ford gave a disdainful sniff and passed her sunshade to her companion to raise. The lowering sun was creeping under the trees. "Mrs. Lincoln happened next, and with her pushed in a delegation of clergymen. They throng the White House day and night. It may interest you to know that they were Abolitionists and they demanded of the President that he issue at once an edict of freedom to the slaves."

"Ha!" ejaculated Tom. "Here's first-hand information on that point! What did he say?"

"After they'd finished explaining to him that it was the Almighty's wish that he wipe slavery from the land, Lincoln asked them if it didn't strike them as curious that when he was carrying the responsibility the Lord should give them the special information and never a word to him. Then he walked off! a way he has of ending an argument." She wiped her face delicately with her handkerchief. "If you are seen here, Tom, there'll be trouble."

"Safest place to hide is in a crowd. No one will bother us except the Lincoln boys, thanks to you," replied Tom.

"Willie won't be back before you leave. Only an Alpine glacier moves more imperceptibly than Willie on an errand. But I have more direct evidence of his feeling about slavery and the war." She told him at length of the episode at Arlington. "Mark my words, Tom, Lincoln is going to work the slavery issue into the war and that at no very distant date. The South will have to hurry, if it is to win the war before that time."

"Is he influenced by Sumner?" asked Taylor.

"If Sumner influences him in anything vital, it's more than any member of his Cabinet has done," replied the Virginian.

"Curse the fool!" muttered Taylor.

"That's just the point. He's turning out not to be a fool," exclaimed Miss Ford.

The two sat brooding for a moment. The sun turned the fog of dust to a golden glory. A drunken soldier gravely offered Taylor a chew of plug tobacco. The Confederate brushed him aside as though he were an importunate fly. The band passed from "Autumn Leaves" to "Believe Me If All Those Endearing Young Charms."

"You recall my telling you about meeting McClellan again when I took the trip to Wheeling?"

Captain Taylor nodded.

"I've not been able to put him out of my mind. He's as fascinating as ever. I'm only a mild sample of what he can do to the stern, as well as the fair sex. He's really sincere in his belief that slavery should be left alone. I wish he were Secretary of War instead of Cameron."

"Why not Secretary of State instead of Seward," returned Taylor with an amused smile, "or President instead of Lincoln?"

Miss Ford gave him a quick look. "Laugh, if you please, but McClellan in the White House would be a godsend to the South. He'd preserve the Union and slavery both." She paused to think, then went on. "Unless the South wins quickly, a dictator is not an unthinkable solution. Greeley has suggested it already in his impatience with Lincoln, and Greeley's following and influence is immense. Listen, Tom! It may not be McClellan, but Jefferson Davis's job is to watch the Northern forces for the right military man to make dictator."

"It all seems unreal and remote," Taylor moved a little uneasily, "but perhaps we can't have too many strings to our bow. I'll certainly pass on your ideas to Davis. Can't say that I seem to hanker for plot and counter-plot as you do."

"All women love it," said the Virginian. "Weren't you delighted with the practical effect of my embracing you yesterday at Arlington?"

"You mean the pass! Yes, it is worth its weight in gold. Ought to carry me through the war. How did you get it?"

"Mr. Lincoln wrote it in the carriage, yesterday, to get me past the sentry. I was frightened to death lest he use my name, and I almost screamed with relief when he wrote 'Pass bearer.' I knew that espionage was going to be stricter and stricter in the city, and I maneuvered a week before I finally worked out the scheme. Of course, I didn't realize the fates would permit me to meet you at Arlington. When do you return to Davis?"

"This report from you is my last chore; Jeff had only a half hope Lincoln could be bluffed into receiving a letter. He's trying anything to get him to acknowledge there is a Confederacy. Is all well at Fairfax Courthouse?"

"Working smoothly, I think. Captain Mosby is in charge under J. E. B. Stuart. Stuart sent me word he would give me a commission as an aide to him if I wished one. We'll see—Ah, the flag raising, at last! You must go now, Tom. The crowd will be breaking."

The man did not stir for a moment, as high above the crowd an enormous flag slowly ascended the pole below the portico, urged by the invisible arms of Lincoln. As the lazy folds whipped out under the dust-laden wind, Taylor rose, silently, his eyes on the flag.

"You are regretful?" asked Miss Ford.

"Always," he replied, "but not the less a firm believer that right is on our side. Good-by, my dear Lady!"

"Take good care of yourself, Tom," she replied, and looked after him until he was lost among the shrubs near Pennsylvania Avenue. Her solitude was not allowed to remain long uninterrupted, however, for Taylor had scarcely reached Pennsylvania Avenue when Willie and Tad appeared, each dragging a pup. Both the boys were dirty and disheveled, and both the pups were barking excitedly. John Hay followed them.

"Where's the man?" demanded Willie.

"He had to go. There didn't seem much hope that you'd be back before Christmas. So sorry, for he'd loved to see the puppies!" Miss Ford looked at the boy's flushed face with a quizzical smile.

"It was an engagement with me, and he'd ought to have kept it," said Willie, in the deliberate voice that always made his remarks impressive. "I brought John Hay along, too, because he seems to like to know the men that know you."

John Hay sighed dramatically and dug into the pocket of his linen trousers. "Hush money again in order, I see. Here you are!" bringing up a handful of pennies. "The popcorn man was making delicious smells as I came by. Divide equally, and take the impregnable fastnesses with you," indicating Sumter and Pensacola, the puppies.

When they were alone, John turned uneasy, black eyes on the Virginian. "Wasn't that Captain Taylor with you? I caught just a glimpse of him through the trees as I came up."

"Mercy, no!" exclaimed Miss Ford. "He's a hundred or a thousand miles away from here by now, I pray. You're not catching spy fever, I hope, Mr. Hay."

"No, I'm not," replied John. "At least, I don't think that's what they call my affliction. It's a curious ailment. Never had it, at least, not seriously, until I met you."

"Indeed! Well," with a provocative little laugh, as her eyes met his levelly, "let's hope that the affliction will not assume serious proportions. Perhaps it will cure itself."

John returned her look. "It will cure itself if it becomes complicated by spy fever."

"Mercy, what a revolting idea! If you'll give me your arm, Mr. Hay, I think I'll join Mrs. Lincoln. It looks as though one could pass through the crowd now without having one's clothing rent from one's body."

They made their way in silence to the house. John left Miss Ford at her door, then went rather unhappily into the secretaries' office. George Nicolay looked up from his writing.

"You have an air of pain, Johnny. Confide in me, do!"

"Miss Ford was holding a confab in the garden just now with the Captain Taylor of yesterday's fame. Then she lied to me about it."

"What else could she do, if you were fool enough to ask her the direct question?" Nicolay dropped his pen and re-lighted his cigar.

"I wish she weren't so devilish good looking," grumbled Hay. "Do you think I ought to warn the President?"

"He needs no warning. You might tell Mrs. Lincoln about it," said Nicolay.

"Well, I may at my first opportunity." John pulled off his coat, and settled himself at his desk. "I wish she wasn't so devilish good looking," he repeated.

Nicolay laughed.

CHAPTER XI

MC CLELLAN

THE following week, the family, with Miss Ford, moved out to the Soldiers' Home, which lay about four miles north of the White House. Here, in the little brick house so reminiscent of the simple home in Springfield, set high on the tree-covered hill, Mary hoped that her husband would find a certain amount of relief, not only from the humid heat of the city, but from visitors as well.

Certainly the nights that Lincoln spent at the Soldiers' Home were cooler than the White House nights, but he experienced far too few of them. His associates felt uneasy when the Chief Executive was out of immediate reach. He himself wanted to be able to wander into the war office at any hour of the night, particularly now that the Army of the Potomac was on the move. Lincoln felt as if the magnificent trees that made a paradise of the park around the brick house were an insuperable barrier between himself and his job. So poor Mary spent a large portion of her time traveling into the city, in the vain attempt to fetch her husband back with her.

When, on July 19th, the first news of McDowell's disaster at Bull Run was brought to the Soldiers' Home by a dusty aide, Mary and Miss Ford immediately left for the Executive Mansion. Nor during the feverish days that followed, when the North seemed to have gone mad with amazement and chagrin, and to be intent on crucifying Lincoln and McDowell—could they be persuaded to return to the country. Willie and Tad, on ponies, with a soldier detailed to guard them, drifted back and forth between the two establishments, enjoying the disorder and excitement quite as much as did Pensacola and Sumter, who had a "chasing" acquaintance with every chicken and cat along the route.

Lincoln was vaguely conscious that his family had returned, and that Mary was extraordinarily tactful and tender with him. He told her, one day, when she had sent his supper up to the Cabinet room without waiting to be asked, that she was as grateful to him as dry socks and a shirt would be to a man working in a tornado. But this was his sole remark to her for several days.

He had bowed his back patiently enough to the outcry following Bull Run. Even the stupidity of the attacks from high places did not surprise him into a retort. General Scott, who was, as may be supposed, deeply chagrined, and yet in an I-told-you-so state of mind, was exceedingly bitter over the criticisms of Edwin M. Stanton, who had been a prominent member of Buchanan's cabinet.

To Lincoln, sitting on the desk in the war office, the old General-in-Chief said, "Stanton is an able man, sir, with a considerable understanding of military problems, and I learned to rely on him before you came in power. But he is not only stupid, sir, but ridiculous when he accuses you, Mr. President, and me of appointing only Republicans to the army."

"Shucks, General," replied Lincoln, patting the old gentleman gently on the shoulder, "you must harden yourself. What Stanton says of you is nothing to what he says of me. He says I'm an imbecile. He lays 'the irretrievable misfortune and national disgrace' of Bull Run directly on my shoulders. And he's quite correct in so doing. I'm going, however, to heed only one point in his or anybody else's hollering. I reckon, as he says, we've got to get a new man in McDowell's place. Too bad, for McDowell's an excellent soldier, competent people like you and William Russell tell me. But the public has lost faith in him. And they are shaky on me too. But," with a chuckle, "I'm not so easy to kill."

"I seriously object to replacing General McDowell!" cried Scott, placing a shaking old hand on his sword.

"I know! It is tough. But it will have to be done, General. What would you say to moving McClellan down here? His victories in West Virginia have put him in high favor, and, as near as I can judge, the young fellow has all the makings of a first class military leader."

Lincoln spoke as tentatively as he could, for Scott was extremely sensitive, but, having the night after Bull Run made up his mind to put McClellan at the head of the Army of the Potomac, he found it a little difficult to show his usual deference in leading the old man to make the decision he, Lincoln, desired.

"Think it over, General," he said, "and let me know what you conclude, within the week. I've had reports from many reliable folks, both male and female, and they all have come under McClellan's charm. You know as well as I do that charm is just about the rarest bird in and about Washington to-day, General."

He shook hands with Scott and returned to his office.

Stanton, though brilliant and hostile, was not in the position to frustrate Lincoln's plans as could Greeley. That very able editor was in an obvious state of funk which he displayed, not only in the New York *Tribune*, but in passionate letters to the President, pleading with him: ". . . You are not considered a great man, and I am a hopelessly broken one. You are now undergoing a terrible ordeal, and God has thrown the gravest responsibilities upon you. Do not fear to meet them. If the Union is irretrievably gone, there should be an immediate disbandment of forces. . . . If it is best for the country and mankind that we make peace with the rebels at once and on their own terms, do not shrink even from that—"

"Greeley ought to uphold my hands better than this," was the only comment Lincoln thought necessary to make on this extraordinary appeal, as he gave the letter back to Nicolay to file, and he turned to his making of a new memorandum on what he designated at the top of the paper "As To The Whole Anaconda Movement."

A few days after the battle of Bull Run, Miss Ford borrowed from Mary the pass which Lincoln had given his wife on the day of the visit to Arlington. She had lost her own pass, said the Virginian, and she wished to go out to Fairfax Court House to see if there was anything left at all of the plantation, and to discover, if possible, the whereabouts of her father. Mary, all sympathy, suggested that they get the President to give her an escort through the chaotic Union lines that stragglingly embraced Fairfax Court House and its environs.

"Go back with Yankee soldiers? The home folks would lynch me!" declared Miss Ford. "No, dear Mrs. Lincoln, Jinny and I will make our way through quietly, and be back to-morrow night."

The conversation took place in Mary's bedroom, where Lizzie Keckley, a colored mantua maker, was at work. She was a negress of considerable intelligence, who had bought her own freedom, and was in great demand among the fashionables of Washington. After Miss Ford had left the room, Lizzie re-pinned the sleeve she was trying on Mary's graceful white arm.

"You are awkward with this fitting, Lizzie. Aren't you well, this morning?"

"Yes, Madam, but I was listening to Miss Ford, I guess, instead of thinking about my work. Madam, if you'll excuse me for saying so, I don't think you should have let her have that pass. Jinny tells me she writes letters all the time to Jefferson Davis, and that they're sent from the tavern at Fairfax Court House."

Mary whirled away from the deft, brown fingers.

"You're saying she's a spy, Lizzie Keckley! You ought to be ashamed of yourself!"

"Madam!" Lizzie drew herself up proudly. She was a finely built woman of middle age, with the dignity often seen in the better type of negro. "Madam, I am no more ashamed than you would be to report a spy. That's why I'm working here, to-day, instead of for other ladies who would pay me better and be less impatient. I want to uphold Mr. Lincoln's hands."

"Lizzie!" exclaimed Mary, with that childish catch of repentance in her voice that endeared her to those who knew her best. "It's I who should be ashamed! But I'm so fond of Miss Ford, and she's been so good to me and the children! I'm sure you must be mistaken!"

The mantua maker laid the flowing sleeve aside, and lifted a billowy drift of pink tartan skirting. "I am not mistaken, Madam President." She smoothed the tartan over the cutting board, which she had laid on the bed, and lifted her shears, hesitated a moment with eyes first on one edge of the material, then on the other, and finally made a great slash as she said:

"Jinny says that Miss Ford wrote a letter last night telling Jefferson Davis that she heard Mr. Lincoln tell Mr. Seward that he was going to bring Major McClellan to Washington to look him over, and that she was going to have a talk with McClellan and size him up."

"But can Jinny read?" asked Mary, fatuously.

"She's as well educated as I am, and you can judge me by my good English. She's a smart nigger, and she's going to help Mr. Lincoln set all niggers free. The word's gone round that he'll bring the day of glory if he can."

Mary stood in her chemise and petticoat, staring first at the mantua maker, then at the new crocheted lace pillow shams Miss Ford had made for her. She was convinced that Lizzie Keckley was telling the truth, and her first impulse was to fly to her husband with the information. But she feared he'd only shrug his shoulders. Surrounded by intrigue in his very Cabinet, by disloyalty in his party, by hatred and deceit from those on whom he must depend to carry on the war, what would second-hand information about a spy mean to him? And what was the use of going to him, or to any one else, until she had checked up Lizzie's statement?

"I suppose, Lizzie," she said, suddenly, through set teeth, "that you think I ought to send Miss Ford away, right now. But I'm going to do nothing of the sort."

The colored woman straightened her back and stood with her scissors poised over the dress material, while she looked at Mary with an expression of singular intelligence. "Why not, Madam?"

"Because, Lizzie, here's my first chance to do something for the war, for my country. The newspapers are always insinuating that I'm giving information to the Secessionists. I think some of the members of Mr. Lincoln's Cabinet believe that my sympathies are Southern. If I catch Miss Ford, it will prove I'm not. See!" She looked eagerly at the colored woman. "I'm so lonely, Lizzie. Now that Mr. Lincoln has reached the White House, my occupation's gone."

"The war has upset everything," Lizzie nodded.

"Well, call it that if you wish," the Mistress of the White House mused sadly for a moment, then said, energetically, "I shall find out what her little game is and beat her at it. I need her, socially. She probably thinks she needs me to get information from me. Very well, dog eat dog, as Mr. Lincoln would say. You'll see that I'm just as clever as Miss Ford."

"You have as much brain, and are better educated. That's just the way I hoped you'd take it!" A sudden smile lighted the colored woman's habitually tragic eyes. "And you've got Jinny and me to help you."

"You haven't mentioned this to any one else, have you, Lizzie?"

"No, Madam President, certainly not."

"Then don't, until I tell you to. . . . So that's why—" Mary suddenly felt hurt and lonely. . . . "I'm just realizing another angle, Lizzie. I thought she liked me,—and I do so need a companion."

"She must like you," declared Mrs. Keckley, stoutly. "Any one who gets to know you real well does. But Miss Ford or any other old-time Southerner isn't going to lose her slaves without fighting for 'em, tooth and claw."

Miss Ford returned in time for tea, the following afternoon. This was a function the Virginian herself had established in the family sitting room. Hither, from four to six o'clock, repaired many members of the exhausted official family, and any Congressman or other caller whom the young secretaries, collaborating with Mrs. Lincoln or Miss Ford, thought worth the attention.

During the early summer, the tea hour had become an essential part of the day's routine. Lincoln liked the idea. He loved any informal opportunity to play host. He strolled in and out of the room, as mood and opportunity permitted. He seldom came alone. Sometimes he brought in a distracted woman, weeping over son or husband caught by the war, and turned her over to his wife for tea, and the kindly word she knew so well how to give. Frequently he dragged forward by the arm a bashful soldier. Once, his guest was a Fox Indian in full regalia, and at another time a festive, white haired and illiterate old tramp, who claimed to have known the President as a boy. Several times he was accompanied by the suave M. Mercier, the French minister, or Lord Lyons, a little condescending.

On the afternoon of Miss Ford's return there was a violent thunderstorm that thinned the throng which usually filled the house, and permitted a fuller attendance at tea, than usual, of the President's associates.

Standing in one of the windows was Seward, arguing violently with Charles Sumner on the matter of Seward's last exchange of insolences with Great Britain. Sumner knew the men then governing England, personally and intimately, and was often in despair, he frequently told Lincoln, over Seward's ignorant tactlessness.

"Father" Welles was seated before the flower-filled fireplace, pulling at his white beard, as he listened to John Hay's opinion of the battle of Bull Run.

Mr. Chase, seated on a couch with his pretty daughter Kate on one side of him, and William Russell on the other, was laying down the law concerning the abilities of John Frémont, whom Lincoln lately had appointed to head up the military department of the West, with headquarters at St. Louis. His sonorous phrasing did not entirely silence the rest of the room, until he was heard to say suddenly to Russell.

"My dear sir, I hear that a Union soldier fired at you when he read your name on your pass yesterday."

All conversation ceased as every one waited for Russell's reply. The Englishman replied coolly. "Yes, it appears that telling the truth is a crime, in this country."

"What did you really do, Mr. Russell?" cried Mary from the tea table. "I've heard that people are saying worse things about you than about me. I can't imagine what vocabulary they are drawing from!"

"I did the usual thing for war correspondents, I fancy, Madam President! I rode out into Virginia with the idea of getting as close as possible to the battle supposed to be raging at Manassas Junction. I was still several miles from the scene of the main action at Bull Run, when I was stopped by fleeing Union soldiers and officers. They literally clogged the roads. Then I wrote to my paper, the London *Times,* what I observed, no more and no less. Last week, the New York *Times* copied my account. Other papers immediately followed suit, branded me as a liar, as having maliciously maligned your glorious troops, as having questioned their bravery. It appears now that the whole country is in full cry against me. I have been christened Bull Run Russell and I have no friends left except—"

He paused, and, with the others, rose as Mr. Lincoln led an officer into the room.

The newcomer was about thirty-five years of age. He was under middle height, but powerfully built, square shouldered, thick throated, with slightly bowed legs. His head, which was covered with heavy auburn hair, was well set, his features regular, with a remarkably determined jaw beneath a reddish brown mustache. His forehead was furrowed. His eyes, a beautiful deep blue, were a little wistful in expression. His whole personality was one of extraordinary charm.

"Mrs. Lincoln," said the President, "this is the new commander of the Army of the Potomac, General McClellan. Miss Ford, I think you said you knew the General. And this is Senator Sumner and here's England, in the shape of Russell. By jings, Russell, you'd better not repeat your opinion of our glorious troops to McClellan, or he'll refuse you a correspondent's privilege."

McClellan looked up into the big Britisher's broad face. "You ought to know something about soldiers if you're the Russell I think you are," he said courteously.

Russell bowed. "I saw you last in the Crimea, sir."

"When you loaned me the only decent horse I'd ridden in a month, sir!" McClellan turned to Lincoln. "That was in 1855, when Jefferson Davis was Secretary of War. He sent three of us to study the operations in the Crimea. . . . So your opinion of my new army is not high? Well, I'm in agreement with you. Come to my headquarters, and I'll tell you how I plan to make a real fighting machine of it."

"There was an officer in, to-day," said Lincoln, sinking into a chair beside Miss Ford, "who told me I was all wrong, that Bull Run wasn't a defeat for the North. As near as I could make out, from his report, our men had licked the Rebels and then had run away."

A general laugh greeted this and the various broken conversations were taken up again. McClellan smiled at Miss Ford, as he took a chair near her. "I recall your telling me that you were keeping strange company, for a Ford of Virginia!" he exclaimed. "Just what are you doing, Lady? I forget details!"

"Earning my living as Mrs. Lincoln's social assistant, and incidentally trying to influence the President on the side of not dealing too harshly with us poor slaveholders," replied the Virginian, with a little smile at Lincoln.

The President returned the smile as he accepted a cup of tea from Mary. "She's influencing all of us, McClellan, one way or another. John Hay writes poetry to her, don't you, John?"

Young Hay blushed but showed no other sign of confusion. "The competition between Russell and myself is very sharp, sir. Russell has every advantage save that of poetic genius."

"So you admit your genius!" exclaimed Mary.

"Certainly!" retorted Hay. "But I've a notion, if Miss Ford continues to be so cold, to get a commission as a major-general."

Everybody laughed, McClellan adding, "Come to me for your training, Hay. I'll see that you're made regimental poet. A minstrel in uniform ought to outrank Russell at every point."

"I see I've got to revise my strategy," declared Russell, looking at Miss Ford with an enigmatic expression in his keen eyes.

"I'm quite sufficiently entranced by your present tactics," drawled the Virginian. "I reckon the ladies in the Crimea, if there were any, must have given you a wonderful schooling, Mr. Russell."

John Hay groaned, and again every one laughed. Russell turned to McClellan. "I shall be glad to avail myself of your invitation, General. When is one apt to find you least busy?"

"Never!" smiled McClellan. "So come when you will. The amount of work to be accomplished is stupendous, but I glory in the thought of it. As if the military details were not enough, the President has been impressing me with the political significance of my work. I find myself in a new and a strange position here! President, Cabinet, and General Scott all deferring to me. By some strange operation of magic, I seem to have become the power of the land."

Miss Ford, who had been leaning toward him over the tea table, drinking in his every word, gave a little sigh. Mary exchanged a look with William Russell. Charles Sumner, who had broken off his conversation with Seward to listen to the conversation round the tea table, rose abruptly. "There's certainly been a grave mistake made in this hasty choice," he said in a low voice to the Secretary of State.

"Lincoln seldom misjudges his man," replied Seward, in the same tone.

Sumner shrugged his shoulders, and took his leave.

McClellan, after a short exchange of Fairfax Court House memories with Miss Ford, rose also. Lincoln took him by the arm.

"Mustn't work too hard, my boy! Too much depends on you. Before you leave, let me show you my map."

He led McClellan into his bedroom, and brought him to pause before the war map which showed by the pins both the ideal "Anaconda" plans, and the actual campaign in progress.

McClellan's blue eyes swept the map intelligently, but cursorily. "Scott's plan has an essential weakness," he said. "As long as we are so heavily outnumbered by the enemy, the coils of the snake will be ineffectual. We must have men, more men, training, and more training. Then I propose to carry this thing *en grand* and crush the Rebels in one campaign."

Lincoln moved uneasily, picked up "Halleck" and laid it down, then quoted good humoredly, "If it were done when 'tis done—then 'twere well it were done quickly."

"Aphorisms won't make an army move," rather contemptuously from the young General, Lincoln thought. "You'll really have to excuse me now, sir. I have some immensely important matters to attend to, to-night."

"Of course you have," agreed the President gently. "Good night, my boy. God speed you in your great task."

Lincoln felt a real sense of relief, with McClellan actually heading the demoralized Army of the Potomac, and after the tea party he yielded to Mary's pleas and consented to spend the night at the Soldiers' Home. He asked William Russell to come along, so, with Mary and Miss Ford, the barouche was full.

The country road was beautiful in the twilight, and for a time there was silence while each of the four enjoyed, in his or her own way, the surcease from the turmoil of the Capital. It was not until the stars were shut out by the great branches of oak and tulip trees that Mary said thoughtfully:

"I wonder what Mrs. McClellan's honest opinion is of her husband."

Russell laughed. "My dear Mrs. Lincoln, what a terrible thought!"

"Not at all!" retorted Mary. "I assure you that my honest opinion of my husband is a very pleasant thing to contemplate."

She was sitting beside Lincoln, and at her stout declaration, he dropped his great hand on her knee.

"We're not going to give you any praise for that," exclaimed Miss Ford. "Are we, Mr. Russell?"

"Certainly not," replied the Englishman. "I claim to be able to pass a very creditable examination myself on the pleasant opinion side. I might go further than you, even, Madam President, having had a wider experience with men."

"Hear! Hear!" chuckled the President. "What a delightful evening I'm having!"

"Well, Mr. Russell, with your wider experience of men, what do *you* think of General McClellan?" asked Mary.

"A man of most felicitous social gifts," replied the correspondent.

"Oh, don't be irritating!" urged Mary. "No one is going to quote you."

"Let's have it, William!" said Lincoln, abruptly, realizing suddenly that there was no one whose opinion he'd rather have.

"William! Mercy, how familiar!" commented Mary.

"Please!" protested Russell. "I can't tell you how complimented I felt—if it means what I hope it means."

"It means I look on you as one of the few disinterested friends I possess, if you want plain truth, by jings!" Lincoln lifted his hand from Mary's tiny knee and banged it down on the Englishman's mighty one. "Now, boy, let's have it."

"His appointment is bound to be popular. He has the points that make for personal popularity. But all he's done to gain his exalted position is to have some skirmishes with bands of Confederates in West Virginia. Is he your best bet, Mr. Lincoln, as you Americans say?"

"Yes," answered the President, thinking of the long hours spent in reviewing all the available material.

"What of Frémont, sir?" asked Russell. "He is at least a more picturesque figure for popular purposes, after his western explorations. He's quite the rage in England."

"Well, I'll tell you one single fact about Frémont," replied Lincoln. "Blair and other of my Cabinet members, and General Scott, were all positive that Frémont, with the Senator Benton following in St. Louis, would do wonders at cleaning up the mess out West. I gave him his appointment the first of July. He stayed in New York three weeks, fussing over some private matters, and Blair and the rest of his backers never got him started for St. Louis until yesterday. He did so with every hour as important to the North out there as a century of ordinary time! Poor Blair got so he squirmed himself out of excuses, when I'd ask him, night and morning, 'Frémont launched yet?' " Lincoln laughed dolefully.

"And what was your opinion of General McClellan, Miss Ford?" asked Mary.

"He's a delightful person. Also, I would guess, a fine executive. My cousin knows of his work for the Illinois Central."

"Humph!" sniffed Mary. "Well, I'll tell you what I think of him."

"Don't, Mary!" protested Lincoln. "You have an awful gift for prophesying the truth about folks."

Mary gave no heed. "George McClellan is already too conceited to see straight, and he's a coward. I know the way his lips quirk and shake."

"He's no coward. I've known him since his West Point days," contradicted Miss Ford.

"Humph!" replied Mary, impolitely.

The carriage turned up the driveway to the house, the boys and the pups tumbled noisily to meet the visitors, and no one spoke of McClellan again that evening.

CHAPTER XII

LIZZIE KECKLEY

LIZZIE KECKLEY, cutting out a red merino cloak for the Mistress of the White House, had a few words to say about Miss Ford's trip to Fairfax Court House, a day or so after the Virginian's return to Washington.

"Jinny says," relieving her mouth of half a dozen pins, "that Miss Ford met an old friend named Captain Taylor out at the Ford's plantation. Jinny listened under the window. She says they were rejoicing over the turn things took at Bull Run, but mostly they were conjecturing about how the President stands on interfering with slavery. They'd heard that General Frémont had said to Horace Greeley, up in New York, that when he got out to St. Louis he was going to pronounce all the slaves in Missouri free, and they were wondering what Mr. Lincoln would do if that happened. Miss Ford, she said Frémont would be assassinated if he tried that foolishness."

Mary turned white. "Don't talk assassination ever in my presence, Lizzie. I live in a bloody shadow. The President constantly is threatened with that!"

"I'm sorry, Madam. I won't again. It seems Miss Ford didn't go out so much to give as to get news. She wanted to hear all about how soon Bull Run made the Secesh leaders feel they would end the war. She kept saying if it didn't end quick, Mr. Sumner would get the slavery issue into it."

"Lizzie," asked Mary, "why has Jinny turned against her mistress, like this?"

"You remember that day you all saw Zeb shoot himself? Well, Zeb was Jinny's husband."

"Ah!" Mary shook her head thoughtfully. "Slavery *is* a wicked thing."

There was little here, Mary felt, to rouse further suspicions regarding the Virginian. Certainly, that astute person was behaving admirably, during these feverish August days. With the let down of social activities that followed McDowell's disaster, she began to give time to the two little boys, taking walks with them, joining them in games of croquet, reading Peter Parley to Tad and to Willie, Scott's "Lay of the Last Minstrel." The children liked her.

Lincoln had not forgotten his thought of sending Miss Ford to Kentucky, but the stress of trying to force action on the part of his military leaders, thrust the thought into the background during August. Even the pertinacity of the Virginian was unable to break through the absorption with which the President studied the prosecution of the war, until chance permitted her to catch him, one moonlit evening, returning from the war office.

She waylaid him under the trees near the north portico. "Kentucky!" she exclaimed, laughingly.

"Jings! You're right! Kentucky!" he replied. "If I fail in my military harvest, I ought to try the harder to bring in political sheaves, eh!"

"Well, Mr. President, August yielded the Union forts, Hatteras and Clark!" suggested Miss Ford.

"Mere flea bites and you know it, Miss Ford!" protested Lincoln, moving toward the door, with the Virginian on his arm. "So you really still want to help me about Kentucky."

"What should change me?" she inquired, looking archly up into his face, as they entered the hall.

Lincoln smiled, but perfunctorily. She was beautiful and likeable, he told himself, but whenever she actually entered his consciousness, he saw Zeb's poor blasted face over her shoulder. Nevertheless, he believed she might give him real help in Kentucky.

"Come up to my office for a few moments," he said. "I can give you your instruction right now, and you can get going, to-morrow or next day."

The heat was extraordinary. The President's office was full of mosquitoes and great moths, buzzing around the lights. Miss Ford set her fan to work the moment she had settled her white organdy ruffles on the little sofa. Lincoln unbuttoned his white linen coat and vest, ran his fingers through his wet black hair, and sank slowly to his desk chair.

"Kentucky worries me," he sighed. "I reckon part of my withered old heart never will leave my native state. It will hurt me forever if she doesn't come over grandly to the Union side. I've sent a pair of good Kentuckians out there. Major Anderson, who's recruiting for me—"

"His name spells magic, since Sumter, of course," interrupted Miss Ford.

Lincoln nodded. "The other emissary is Navy Lieutenant William Nelson! You've seen him playing about here with John Hay. He has the social gifts Kentucky appreciates. I've given him leave of absence and sent him to Kentucky, without instructions. Then, there's my dear friend James Speed of Louisville. He is—"

Lincoln suddenly paused. Something in the deep violet eyes, looking so clearly into his, tore his thoughts for the moment from the spheres of influence he was establishing in Kentucky. For the first time in the course of his acquaintanceship it occurred to him that Miss Ford liked him, that her scorn, her earlier patronizing manner, had been replaced by respect and almost, he might have sworn, affection. If this were the case, he need not guard his statements, limiting them to facts all the world knew, as he had been doing. If she now respected and liked him, her loyalty would not be so open to question,—always, of course, remembering that she was a slaveholder.

"What is troubling you, sir?" asked the Virginian, in her soft, slow tones.

"Well, I was thinking that your attitude had changed toward me. That you weren't looking on me so much as the toy jumping jack, jerked by Seward and Sumner, as you did at first, and in that case, I'd tell you something more about conditions out yonder."

"Why should you think I could look on you so?" exclaimed the Virginian, indignantly.

"Oh, come, Miss Ford," Lincoln smiled at her. "I can see through a stone fence as far as any one! I'd like to possess McClellan's ways, or young Nelson's, and I know just how you ladies feel toward me."

"If you knew how I felt toward you, you'd be ashamed of your last three or four statements," retorted Miss Ford.

"That's good! I'm obliged to you, Miss Ford," feeling that, for once, she was showing him the side most remote from her devotion to slavery. "This being so, I'll talk to you about Frémont. Kentucky has its eye on the General. If he keeps on fooling with emancipation of the slaves, Kentucky will kick over the traces, and secession will get her. If he does go very far in that direction, I'll abrogate whatever he does!"

The Virginian smiled. "Good! There's where your hard common sense speaks."

"There's where I'm trying to soothe your slavery qualms," thought the President. Aloud, he said, "Of course, Frémont may listen to my warnings, that is, if Mrs. Frémont will back me. She's old Benton's daughter and ought to have been a man. She's handsome as they make 'em, and she's Frémont's boss. Now, then, didn't I hear you say that you'd met her?"

"For once, I must fail you on an acquaintance, sir," shaking her head, "but we have many mutual friends. I know that she knows of me, very well."

"Good! You go out to St. Louis and make Mrs. Frémont make her spouse see sense about emancipation in its effect on Kentucky, to say nothing of Missouri."

"I like that errand. Like the other one, I can do it with perfect honesty!" cried Miss Ford.

"It's the sort of errand I aim to give people," said Lincoln, rising with a weary sigh.

Miss Ford swept slowly toward the door, where she paused to say, with convincing sincerity,

"I hope nothing will ever happen to prevent my doing such constructive work as this." The door swung gently after her, and Lincoln went to bed.

Acting on her usual plan of confiding nothing of her personal affairs to any woman, Miss Ford merely asked Mrs. Lincoln for permission to have a two weeks' leave of absence, for business reasons, and she was gone before it occurred to the President that Mary should have been consulted. When, the evening after the Virginian's departure, Mary said at supper, with a sigh,

"Poor Miss Ford had to go off again. I do miss her so!" Lincoln, with the guilty adroitness of a long-married husband, looked sympathetic, shook his head and asked Mary how her garden was coming along.

It was Lizzie Keckley with a letter from Jinny in St. Louis who roused Mary's slumbering suspicions. Not that the report told of Miss Ford's being engaged in any but loyal activities, but it stated that Mrs. Frémont's maid had heard Mrs. Frémont speak of Miss Ford as Mr. Lincoln's unofficial emissary.

Mary's quick temper flared. She tore the letter in half and, with the pieces in her hands, flew to find her husband. John Hay, looking up from his shabby desk, in the still shabbier secretaries' office, looked troubled as he saw the fury in Mrs. Lincoln's eye.

"The President is in conference with Mr. Seward and Mr. Cameron," he said. "They are in great trouble. Word has just reached us that General Frémont has issued a proclamation freeing all the slaves belonging to rebels in the State of Missouri. Looks as if we'd lose the border states to secession, in spite of the way the President has been nursing them along."

"Yes, and do you realize that Miss Ford is out there,—as one of Mr. Lincoln's nurses,—that he's trusted that spy! That's what comes of his ceasing to confide in me." Mary shook the torn letter before John's anxious and abashed gaze.

"Oh, do you think that, too," he exclaimed.

"Too!" cried Mary. "What do you mean, John Hay? Don't try to soothe me!"

"I want to soothe you just enough so that you'll let me confide in you about Miss Ford, dear Madam President," retorted the young man. "But if you frighten me to death, the confidences, of course, will be lost to you and the world forever!"

In spite of herself, Mary's blue eyes twinkled. "I'm glad I'm formidable to some one!" she exclaimed.

"Formidable! My poor knees are clacking together like the clapper bones in a minstrel show. When you came in, I thought I was to be beheaded. Now I hope for nothing worse than forty years in the Tower!" He was leading her slowly toward Nicolay's empty chair, as he chattered. "How lovely that purple dress is! Have I seen it before? What is it made of, poplin?"

"It's a lavender print, goose. Come, John, I'm sorry I showed temper, but really—that man—"

"What's the poor old Tycoon done now?" asked John, looking at her with an affectionate smile. "How do you like my new name for him? We are corresponding at present with the Tycoon of Japan, concerning treaty ports. Nicolay and I think the title just suits our blessed War Chief."

"You ought to watch him more closely than you do, John, or he won't be a Tycoon long. Now listen to me! I must tell this or burst."

She gave him a concise account of Lizzie Keckley's and Jinny's reports on Miss Ford. She was a remarkable raconteur and John Hay, in spite of an anxious scowl, chuckled many times during the recital. When the story was done, he told her of the seemingly trivial incidents that had made him uneasy regarding the beautiful Virginian.

"And what's more, I think William Russell shares my suspicions," he ended.

"But I thought you both were more or less in love with her!" exclaimed Mary.

Hay grinned. "So we are, in a comfortable sort of way. She's quite a perfect object to which to devote verses."

"Oh! That!" Mary shrugged the plump shoulders across which the lavender print was draped so gracefully. "Will you tell Mr. Lincoln, or shall I, John? I don't relish the job, now I'm cooled down. He does trust his friends so!"

John sighed. "I'll tell him, of course, but he'll wish to follow it up with you and Lizzie."

"I suppose so," echoing his sigh, as she left the office.

She got her moment with the President, just before he started for a tour of inspection of the fortifications McClellan was throwing up around the city. He listened to her intently, shaking his head in a troubled way.

"I've been uneasy about her, ever since the Zeb episode. I thought she was actually growing friendly, though, I still was a little uneasy. I fixed this job in

St. Louis so if she wasn't playing fair, she'd be pretty sure to stub her toe and show her petticoat."

"What are you going to do about it?" urged Mary, anxiously.

"Wait for her to show her petticoat," he replied, stooping to kiss the troubled face. "There's going to be several folks talk too much, shortly. I sent a letter to Frémont to-day, abrogating his freeing of the slaves."

"Well, Abra'm, even after twenty years, you do beat me!" exclaimed his wife. "I thought I had to protect you from her!—You keep out of the sun all you can, this afternoon."

"Yes, ma'am," replied the President, meekly.

There was, indeed, a flood of talk set loose by Lincoln's abrogation of Frémont's act. All the Abolitionists in Congress immediately were about the President's ears. Charles Sumner could not contain himself for indignation. He was in New York when he heard of Lincoln's action, but the moment he returned to Washington he called his carriage and galloped to the White House. That it happened to lack but a half hour to midnight made no impression on him.

Lincoln was in his bedroom, in his nightshirt and slippers,—the night was stifling,—reading *Petroleum Nasby* on War. He was shrieking with laughter, as Sumner burst unceremoniously in at the door.

"Mr. Lincoln! How could you?" groaned Sumner, dramatically casting his high hat and the newspaper report of Lincoln's letter together on the table.

"Jings! Listen to this, Charles! How does the fellow think of such gags?"

While Sumner walked the floor, groaning, the President read aloud the paragraph which he had so enjoyed. Then he pulled off his spectacles, and placed them in the pamphlet. "If I didn't laugh at least once a day, Charles, I'd cut my throat. What's on your mind?"

Sumner tossed his great arms into the air, and replied, with a voice that shook the chandelier: "How idle to possess the power of a god, and not to use it godlike! A vain masquerade of battles, a flux of blood and treasure and nothing done! This was your great moment, and you cast it back in the teeth of the man who gave it to you!"

"Meaning John Frémont? I've had a lot of trouble with that fellow." Lincoln thrust a long, bare leg over the arm of his chair, and shook his head. He was sorry that Sumner had come to him at such a weary moment of the day, but, since he was here, it would be best to arrive at a clear understanding with the great Abolitionist.

"Frémont's proclamation," he said, "is simply dictatorship. It assumes that a general may do anything he pleases, political as well as military. Frémont's proclamation was not an act of military necessity, but based on his own political desires. Did I not abrogate this act, I should be surrendering the government by permitting a general to make permanent rules of property."

"Quibbling!" cried the Senator. "Legal quibbling that every day gives moral support to the rebellion!"

"Charles, use a little Yankee sense along with your oratory. The Kentucky legislature wouldn't budge in our favor until I modified Frémont's proclamation. To lose Kentucky was to lose Missouri and Maryland, and the job on our hands would be too large for us. We would as well consent to separation at once, including the surrender of this Capital. But the revocation of Frémont's decree has saved Kentucky to the Union, and placed forty thousand soldiers in the Union Army."

"I have no patience with the undue influence the border states are having on this administration—" Sumner was interrupted by the sudden opening of the hall door.

A fine looking woman in a sweeping black silk dress, her dark hair looped over her ears, a gray veil thrown back over her tiny bonnet, swooped into the room. Miss Ford in a green silk traveling cloak, and a broad green hat with sweeping plume followed her. Sumner gave an agonized glance at Lincoln's nightshirt. With astounding quickness, he tossed the dressing robe from the bed to the President's knees, while Miss Ford performed a breathless introduction:

"Mr. Lincoln, may I present Mrs. John Frémont who—"

Mrs. Frémont interrupted. "Who has come from St. Louis, without rest or sleep, to demand an immediate explanation of your brutality to her husband. Why have you dared—"

"Just a moment, Madam!" protested Lincoln. "A man in his nightshirt is at a disadvantage in an interview of this sort, as my friend Sumner has tactfully suggested. But if the general public insists on using my bedroom as a reception hall, I'm the last man in these United States to protest." He pulled on the robe slowly as he continued, "Mrs. Frémont, this is Senator Charles Sumner."

Mrs. Frémont bowed, but the rush of her anger could not be checked or diverted, and, with a sigh, Lincoln, long trained in the symptoms of feminine hysteria, gave her her way.

"You have dared to send Montgomery Blair out to St. Louis to spy on John Frémont—A *Blair!* Not fit to black my husband's boots. Isn't that true, sir?"

"The Blairs, when the war began," replied Lincoln, mildly, "could think of nothing but Frémont. At their earnest recommendations and solicitations, he was made a general and sent to St. Louis."

"I don't believe it! I don't believe they've ever been anything but his enemies," cried Mrs. Frémont.

"One moment, Mrs. Frémont!" Miss Ford put a firm hand on the older woman's arm. "You forgot yourself when you broke into this room at midnight. You are still further forgetting yourself when you give Mr. Lincoln the lie. He's not only President of the United States, but he's also not the kind of a man you speak so to!"

"Abe Lincoln?" cried Mrs. Frémont. "From the backwoods on the Sangamon? This is his kind of language!"

"I'll not tolerate this!" ejaculated the Virginian, drawing herself to her fine height, and looking extraordinarily handsome in the flickering candlelight. "When you asked me to introduce you to the President, I did not agree to acquiesce to your insulting him."

"Don't worry, Miss Ford," said Lincoln. "I'm a hard person to insult. Give her her head for a little. Sometimes it cures 'em."

Mrs. Frémont who had been nervously ransacking the little silk bag she carried, now shook a letter in Lincoln's face, and demanded of him, in exchange for it, any letters he may have had from Frank or Montgomery Blair concerning her husband.

The room was poorly lighted. Lincoln had been reading by a single candle, the light of which flickered on his hollow cheeks, his tender lips, the shadowed gray eyes daily growing more shadowed. Sumner looked from this beautiful and ugly face, at which so shortly before he himself had glared in anger, to the quivering, half-maddened features of John Frémont's wife, and, even in the dim candle glow, one could see him flush. His own great egotism melted as it had melted many times before in Lincoln's presence.

"Whatever the President has done at least has been done properly, and I for one—" he tried to be heard above Mrs. Frémont, but failed.

The door from Mary's room opened and Mary, in her pink boudoir gown, appeared. She was carrying her candle. She placed it on the reading table, then stood beside Sumner, listening.

For perhaps five minutes Mrs. Frémont rushed on, reciting the history of her husband's course, denouncing his accusers, demanding retractions, apologies and new commissions. No one interrupted her, until, with eyes filled with tears of weariness and indignation, she declared:

"You are merely jealous. You know that if John C. Frémont wished, he could have your place here in the White House." There Mary took a step toward her.

"Madam!" she began.

Lincoln touched his wife on the shoulder. "Mary, be silent!" he said, giving her what she called his "look of granite." She subsided. But Miss Ford did not recognize the look, or at least she refused to apply it to herself.

She seized Mrs. Frémont by both wrists and shook her, vigorously. She was furiously angry, herself.

"Do you mean to say, Mrs. Frémont, that that weak, vacillating man of yours could ever hope to hold the reins here? Don't you know that it would require a man of twice General Frémont's mental stature, and ten times his military skill? And don't you realize by now that Lincoln is a consummate politician, that he's never going to alienate the Southern Unionists by setting the slaves free?"

Mrs. Frémont whirled so impetuously on the Virginian that her crinolines knocked *Petroleum Nasby* off the table. The President rescued his spectacles and the pamphlet, giving the latter a little pat as he laid it down.

"If you were so sure of that, madam," shrieked Mrs. Frémont, "why did you try by every sly method to encourage my husband to issue that edict of freedom?"

"Your insinuations are utterly false, Madam Frémont!" cried the Virginian, furiously.

"You shall not give me the lie! I was bred in politics and I understand political intrigue, even when it's far more cleverly handled than yours, Miss Ford," ejaculated Mrs. Frémont. "But whatever is your motive, your scheming will fail. No one can be the head of this government who will not before long agree to free the slaves if the Union forces win."

"Your husband will never be that head, notwithstanding the machine you are building in Missouri, to that end," drawled Miss Ford.

"Nor will George McClellan, in spite of your favor, Madam," retorted Mrs. Frémont. "No one can become a real leader of this Union who is afraid to free the slaves."

"No man can attempt to free the slaves in this country and not be assassinated," drawled Miss Ford.

There was a moment of appalled silence, broken by Sumner. "Miss Ford, dare you so to malign your countrymen? Dare you?"

The Virginian tossed him a haughty look, in which sparkled a considerable degree of contempt. "Your fanaticism is as absurd, Charles, as Horace Greeley's. The only difference is that you thunder in the open, where any one can come back at you, while Greeley screams his invectives and then runs to hide under the bed. But both of you are alike in mistaking the temper of this country as regards the freeing of slaves. Am I not right, Mr. Lincoln?"

But Jessie Frémont was not to be permanently turned from her quarry. Startled into silence for a moment by Miss Ford's abrupt suggestion, she revived and returned with renewed vigor to her attack on the President. He watched her with weary patience, until she threw the letter from her husband in his face. He picked this up, and thrust it into the pocket of his dressing gown. Then he shook his finger before Mrs. Frémont's eyes so suddenly that she caught her breath. He quickly made his statement:

"Madam, you have taxed me so violently with many things that I've had to exercise all the awkward tact I have to avoid quarreling with you. I will answer the general's letter by mail. Kindly make no attempt to prolong or repeat this interview. And now, good night, everybody. I'm going to bed."

He picked up his candle, nodding his head at Mary. She at once lifted hers, made a sweeping bow and left the room. Charles Sumner took one of Mrs. Frémont's arms, Miss Ford, the other, and thus they forced the protesting, half weeping woman out the door. Lincoln listened to her voice receding down the hall, then he blew out his candle and got into bed.

CHAPTER XIII

FRÉMONT

LINCOLN'S waking thought, the next morning, was that if he was in for an unpleasant session with Miss Ford, he'd better have done with it as soon as possible. The Virginian, apparently, was at one with him as to the value of speed, for she met him in the garden, whither he slipped for a breath of air before breakfast. She wore the green traveling suit and carried a little reticule filled with papers.

Lincoln, standing under a copper beach, hands clasped behind his back, watched her sweep up the path, her poise unassailable, he thought.

"Good morning, Mr. President! That was a horrid scene you were inflicted with, last night. I tried my utmost to persuade her to leave it till morning. But all I could do was to follow her and try to protect you from the worst."

"Can't blame Mrs. Frémont for fighting for her General," replied Lincoln. "You were the one I needed protection from!"

"I?" raising her eyebrows.

"Why did you try double dealing in St. Louis, Miss Ford?" laying a great hand on her shoulder and looking into her fine eyes. "Do the slaves mean more to you than honor?"

She flushed painfully but returned his look. "I was not double dealing in St. Louis. I gave you the chance to show your stand on slavery and thus save Kentucky. Didn't it swing the legislature immediately for the Union?"

Lincoln gazed at her with a curious sort of admiration. If her influence had counted with Frémont, she had done just that! But what was her motive? He dropped his hand from her shoulders, and bowed his head in thought. The Virginian watched him with a smile half wistful, half determined, touching her lips.

His suspicions were thoroughly roused about her, now, but he did not think it would be wise summarily to dismiss her. She was a person of distinguished friendships. She was herself a personage. He proposed to know exactly what her business in the White House might be. He was convinced that this was no ordinary spy case, such as the chief of the National Detective Police might handle successfully.

"Perhaps it helped," he agreed, reluctantly. "Suppose you give me the report on your work out there."

"I have written it out for you," she said, "because I have to go immediately to our plantation. My father is ill. I hope to be back in a couple of days."

"Very well," replied the President. "I'll go over the whole matter with you, on your return." He shook hands with her, with a distinct sense of relief. Jinny and Mrs. Keckley were as competent as Baker to watch the Virginian, outside the White House.

He read her report at breakfast, handing it over afterward to Mary. It was a remarkably keen diagnosis of the whole complicated situation in Missouri, where not only was North contending with South, but where conservative and radical Northerners, as the pro-slavery and anti-slavery forces were called, fought bitterly one with the other. Lincoln, for months, had been obliged to interfere personally, in an endeavor to force sufficient harmony to save the people of the State from the lawlessness and crime that prevailed.

Miss Ford passed lightly over these facts, long known, of course, to the President. But she gave details that the

President had not heard as yet, of the bitter personal quarrel between Frémont and the highly influential family of Blairs, who were loyal to the administration, intensely eager to hold their much loved Missouri to the Union. The blame for this, Miss Ford laid squarely on the shoulders of Frémont. This was important information if true. But still more important for the President's attempt to analyze Miss Ford's obscure motives, was the suggestion that closed her report.

She thought that General McClellan should be sent to Missouri for a month, to clean up the civil as well as the military chaos that reigned in the State.

"I wonder," was Lincoln's comment as he gave the document to John Hay, when he reached his office, "just how far-reaching her friendship for George McClellan is."

Young Hay took the paper with a look of interest. "I heard that she was back, Mr. President, very much so!" with a grin. Then he nodded toward the reception room. "There's a group of reporters out there, sir, champing on the bit and snorting. General McClellan has issued another of his mad, sad statements, and they want your opinion on it. Among others, is the fellow I ordered last spring not to come here again, the one that accredited a vile joke to you about one of your Cabinet members. I told him you wouldn't see him, but he showed me a glowing letter from Miss Ford, introducing him to you."

Lincoln flushed. That evil pun had made him infinite trouble with Secretary Chase, who had refused to believe Lincoln's repudiation of its authorship.

"It makes me just as mad to be accused of telling smutty stories as it would be if they called me a bawd, out and out," he declared, angrily.

Young Hay took an eager step toward his chief. "You see, sir, you have the reputation, already passing into legend, of being incapable of losing your temper, even of feeling righteous indignation. A fellow like this Gordon trades on that reputation, or he'd never dare to come near you. Now I've seen you hopping mad, several times, and it has a most salutary effect on every one."

"Bring him in here to me, John," said Lincoln. "They can accuse me of drunkenness, of treachery to my party, they may call me an ape and a clodhopper and a fool, and I can keep silence. But when it comes to saying I deal in smut—well, we can't stop the spread of the poison now, but I can show one of the carriers what I think of it. Bring Mr. Obscene Gordon in here."

John rushed from the room and returned at once, followed by a youngish man, handsome in a florid, loose-lipped fashion, dressed in the most immaculate of gray linen suits.

"This, Mr. President," said Hay, "is the reporter of whom I spoke to you last spring."

Gordon nodded his head familiarly to the President. "Say, Lincoln, what is your comment on the report that McClellan has said, 'I would cheerfully take the dictatorship and agree to lay down my life when the country is saved'?"

"Have you credentials, *Mr.* Gordon, giving your title to my confidences?" asked Lincoln.

"Oh, didn't think you were particular. I'm from the New York *World* and here's a letter from a friend of yours and the Madam's." The young man handed the President a note which he took and very deliberately putting on his spectacles, read.

"Dear Mr. Lincoln: All my friends are not Southerners. Some of them belong to New York and Boston. Mr. Gordon's father and mine have been business associates in a remote way. Mr. Gordon's brother carries on his father's business. Mr. Ethan Gordon, who presents this to you, is a brilliant newspaper writer who has a large following of readers. May I presume to suggest that his friendly understanding of your Administration would be of great political value to you.

I am, dear Mr. Lincoln, with most respectful and humble salutations, the least of the secretaries,

ANNABEL FORD."

Lincoln passed the letter to Hay. "Keep that with her report, John." Then he turned to Gordon. "About that nasty pun on Mr. Secretary Chase, you spread abroad as coming from me. I don't like it, Mr. Gordon. It is not an open sesame to my confidence."

Gordon laughed. "But it was witty, you'll admit, Lincoln. You ought to be glad to have it believed you fathered it. I'll never give you away, if that's the angle of it you don't like."

Lincoln's great hands twitched. "Open the door, John," he ordered. With astounding quickness, one of his long arms shot out. He seized Gordon by the coat collar, and twisted him toward the door. Then he lifted his long leg in the enormous carpet slipper, and a second later Gordon catapulted into the midst of the astounded reporters milling about Billy Stoddard's desk.

"There," sighed Lincoln, "that didn't do him a might of harm, and it did me a lot of good. Let the others in now, John."

It was after he had finished a pleasant ten minutes with the newspaper men that one of McClellan's aides, who had witnessed Gordon's hasty departure from Lincoln's presence, came in and ventured a comment.

"Mr. President, that fellow Gordon is in a position to do you a lot of harm, if he wants to. He's a popular war correspondent."

"You know him well?" inquired Lincoln. "Like his stories?"

"I've never met him, sir, though I suppose I shall. He's a great friend of General McClellan's, and has free entrance to his councils."

"I'm sorry to hear that," was Lincoln's comment. "What can I do for you, Captain?"

"General McClellan wishes me to say, sir, that the forward movement of the troops which you ordered for Monday week is impossible. The enemy has at Manassas 130,000 troops while we number less than 85,000. He earnestly desires that you send him at least 50,000 more men."

"My report from General Scott, yesterday," replied Lincoln, quickly, "shows 155,000 of our troops on the other side of the Potomac. Every line of transportation into Washington is clogged with soldiers, and there are more to come. McClellan feels that he has a lien on the best troops, the best officers in the country. I have given them to him. He has begged me to detach no troops or officers from his command, no matter what the emergency elsewhere, or the pressure brought to bear on me. I have acceded to his request. He told me a week ago that he was ready to destroy Beauregard. Now he asks for more troops."

"And he must need them, if he says so, sir," said the officer, earnestly. "He knows his business."

"I am banking the resources of this country on the people's faith in him," returned Lincoln, running his hands through his hair. "God give him strength," he thought, "to learn his business and give me patience to uphold his hands while he does so." Then aloud, "Very well, he shall have his men with what dispatch I can urge on General Scott."

The Captain saluted, and turned briskly on his heels.

Lincoln, alone for a moment, brought his fist down on his desk.

"By jings, some one has got to move! If none of our generals can, I'll learn how, myself. . . . Hello, Governor," as Seward came in, hands full of papers.

"Did I catch you talking to yourself, Mr. Lincoln?" smiling as he dropped wearily into a chair. "Sure sign of senility, I've heard."

"Guess you've got me, Governor. I was cussing out our military men. Looks like you and I would have to shoulder a gun ourselves."

"We'd make a fine pair of old vultures, Lincoln! But, speaking of senility, that's really what's the matter with our armed forces, east and west. Old Scott is doddering. Why not get rid of him and put McClellan in his place. By the gods, he is a young Napoleon! Scott is jealous of him and one can scarcely blame him!"

"George has got his hands full, I reckon, with the Army of the Potomac, Governor. Let's see some results with that before we boost the boy again."

"Nonsense! Boy! He's reached his full stature now."

"Governor, what's he done besides train the green hands? Why doesn't he move? Is he going to let the fall rains interfere; and his campaign for the year end before it's begun?" Lincoln, who had risen, took a seat on the Cabinet table and caught Seward by his shoulders as he passed. "Seward, I'm oppressed with evil foreboding this morning. I am backing, and shall back, McClellan to the uttermost limits. Am I right?"

The Governor put both his hands affectionately on the President's knees and gave him a clear look from his fine, blue eyes.

"You are absolutely right, Lincoln. Wise in your choice and in your patience as you always are. Make McClellan General-in-Chief, find him a Secretary of

War in whom he has confidence, and the war is won."

Lincoln hesitated as he was learning to hesitate over Seward's impulsive suggestions. He said slowly, "Scott has already urged me to accept his resignation. McClellan has affronted him needlessly, I fear—I'll think about it. Yes—yes, I'll think about it."

The two men remained staring at each other, then Stoddard brought a message to Seward and he left. But it was several moments before the President turned to his waiting desk. Even then, for many minutes he sat pondering on all he knew about George McClellan.

CHAPTER XIV

BALL'S BLUFF

LINCOLN, that evening, sat long on the edge of Mary's bed, discussing Miss Ford with her. He was much relieved when Mary agreed with him that the time had not yet arrived for turning the detective police on the Virginian's trail. Mary was very sure that, given time, she, with Lizzie and Jinny, could trace Miss Ford's motives to their source. And thus the matter was left.

When after three days, the Virginian returned from the plantation and settled with great apparent happiness to her light duties in the White House, Mary did not find it difficult to treat her with friendliness. She liked Miss Ford, and, as she admitted to herself, a little ruefully, the Virginian knew how to play on her pet weakness, social ambition.

Moreover, while Jinny's report was puzzling, it was not particularly disquieting. Her mistress had met Captain Taylor at the plantation. Miss Ford had chattered to him at some length on the political situation in Missouri and Kentucky, but most of their talk had been about McClellan and the possibility of persuading Lincoln to make the proposed visit to St. Louis, "where," Miss Ford had said, "he will all unconsciously sow the seeds for the great harvest."

Mary talked Jinny's story over with John Hay, and they agreed to wait for the Virginian's next move, before troubling the President again with the matter. What that move might be, they did not guess until later in the autumn. And then it was made with such frankness that they were utterly disconcerted.

In October, Miss Ford induced the mistress of the White House to resume her weekly semi-public teas in the Blue Room. Her scheme, she told Mary quite frankly, was to entice the lion and the lamb to break bread together.

"If word percolates to the influential centers of the South," she said, "that Mrs. Lincoln has no anti-slavery predilections, as she shows by the fact that she invites some of the most rabid pro-slavery wives to take a dish of tea with her, it will do more to dissipate the horrid gossip about you, in Washington, than anything I can think of."

Mary, who was still suffering acutely under the derision and insults of social Washington, was only too ready to agree with the Virginian, and so the weekly teas flourished. They were attended by a carefully chosen, but incongruous crowd. Ladies who paraded their slaves in the shape of negro maids in the very drawing rooms, rubbed shoulders with ladies from Boston, who smiled at the maids, and scowled at their mistresses. Ladies from New York affected the large cosmopolitan manner toward both factions, and ignored certain ladies from the Lincolns' home town, who refused to be patronized by any one, particularly by New Yorkers.

Mary found these teas immensely amusing and inspiriting. In fact, every one seemed to be complacent about them, except Lizzie Keckley. She, vigorously attacking the exquisite materials for which Mrs. Lincoln had made a trip to New York, made no bones about expressing her disapproval.

"You're giving those slavery folks exactly what they want, Mrs. Lincoln," she said, one October afternoon, when she was helping her mistress to dress for the weekly tea pouring.

"What is it they want?" asked Mary, trying the effect first of a black lace scarf on her red velvet frock, then of a crimson India shawl.

"They want to influence General McClellan, without him or any other Northerner realizing it. He comes two or three times a month to the teas, with his handsomest officers. Then Miss Ford, and any lady from Virginia or South Carolina or Alabama can flatter him just the way they've been told to flatter him, and give him any ideas about himself and Mr. Lincoln they want him to get. Madam, you just watch and see if it isn't the day after these tea parties that the President has the hardest time with McClellan."

"I have no way of learning that." Mary shrugged her shoulders impatiently under the India shawl, on which she finally had settled. "Even if what you say is true, I don't see how my stopping these teas will keep them from reaching McClellan. They'd just go about it another way. And, Lizzie, you've no idea how much these affairs have helped me, personally. Why, it's been weeks since I've had an anonymous letter, Stoddard says, with a Washington or Southern postmark. And it's only rarely that I'm yelled at in the streets, never any more by well dressed women."

If the pathos of this plea struck Lizzie Keckley, she gave no sign. She rose from her knees,—she had been tying Mary's sandals,—and gave her an appraising look from her dark eyes. "Just as soon as you told me about the things Miss Ford and Mrs. Frémont said, that night, I felt that General McClellan ought to be guarded against these—these—" suddenly her dark face purpled—"these Southern witches. He's a mighty good soldier they tell me, and you certainly ought to help protect him, Mrs. Lincoln."

"Oh, you are too officious, Lizzie!" exclaimed Mary, switching from the room.

Nevertheless, her conscience smote her that afternoon, as she watched the handsome young general surrounded by the usual group of vivacious women. She, herself, had never changed her first impression of McClellan. She did not believe in the disinterestedness of his motives. She feared his ambition. She was convinced that he was afraid to fight. But her husband trusted him, and his country idolized him. She had no right, she told herself, to permit her social ambitions to lay him open to undue influence. Troubled by these thoughts she was impatient with Tad, when he came marching into the drawing room in the uniform of an officer of the 71st Pennsylvania which Baker, the former Senator from Oregon, now in the Army of the Potomac, had had made for the child.

"Run out, Taddie," she exclaimed. "No, you can't have even a teaspoonful of tea."

Tad's nerves jangled in response to hers. "You must give an officeh whateveh he asks fo'," he screamed, stamping his foot. "Colonel Baka'll have you locked up. He told me no one could boss me in these clothes."

"Colonel Baker is our much loved friend," said Mary, with a little smile, for the benefit of the listening women, "but he mustn't put absurd ideas into your little head. Run out, Taddie!"

Tad made a grab at the cream jug and upset it on Mary's red India shawl. He began to cry hysterically and his mother rose hastily to take him from the room. She was furious with the child. But she managed to control herself until she had dragged Tad to the sanctuary of her own room, then she spanked him soundly, sent him to bed, and felt the better for it.

His screams brought Lincoln into the room, pen in hand.

"Yes, I whipped him," exclaimed Mary in response to his inquiring look, "and I'll thank you not to go coddling him. He's a saucy, disobedient boy, and you're the one that makes him so. Look at this shawl!"

She held it up, giving as she did so a succinct history of Tad's sins.

"Is McClellan down there?" asked the President abruptly, when she had finished.

"Yes, surrounded by the usual bouquet of Southern beauty," replied Mary.

"He sent me word that he was too busy to come to a Cabinet conference, this afternoon," mused Lincoln. "Funny!"

"Not funny at all," snapped Mary. "Quite in line with his condescending manner to you. He's completely spoiled too. I don't see why you endure it."

"Mary, I'd hold McClellan's horse for him, if he'd win this war for me. Nothing else matters." He looked at her with grave sweetness.

Mary dropped her shawl to the floor and threw her arms about him. "Oh, Abra'm! Abra'm! You shame me, utterly! I'm so trivial. But love me, dearest, love me in spite of it! Love me for my big love for you, if for nothing else."

Lincoln picked her up as if she had been Taddie, and, holding her against his heart, he looked down into her eyes.

"You know that I love you," he said, tenderly.

"But not as I love you! Not with the feeling I have for you." She hid her face against his heart.

An expression of acute pain tightened the muscles of the President's face, but he said nothing. He wondered if he were capable any more of feeling toward any human being in the world as Mary felt toward him,—if this ghastly weight of responsibility could crowd out of his life forever all intimate personal relations. Some day, he thought, when there was more time, he would try to explain this to Mary. But now, he must return to his re-writing of Seward's message to France on the cotton blockade. Seward was too hasty in issuing ultimatums but, by jings, he knew law!

He set Mary gently to her feet, and would have hurried away, but she caught one finger in a buttonhole of his vest.

"Abra'm, let me go downstairs and send McClellan up to you! I'd like nothing better than a chance to do so! Two can play at this errand-boy game.—What McClellan needs is what I just gave poor little Taddie."

Lincoln smiled and shook his head. "No, thanks. I'll look him up later in the evening. Let me go, dear Mary."

"Just one thing more, Abra'm! I never get a moment alone with you. At these teas of mine, there are, I think and believe, emissaries of Jeff Davis,—women who seek to flatter McClellan into believing that he's a slave Unionist. Do you wish me to cut off those affairs?"

"You get a lot of pleasure out of these tea fights, don't you, Mary?"

"Yes, I do, but if you say stop, they stop, with no recriminations."

"I know of no better way to give McClellan his chance than to give him all the rope he wants, Mary. After he's had his fling, I think the real stuff in him will come out. Russell says there's no better hand that he's ever seen at licking an army into shape."

Mary jerked firmly at the buttonhole. "Abra'm, I don't care what William Russell or any one else says. McClellan is small potatoes. You'll be able to win the other members of your Cabinet, excepting possibly Chase, as you have Seward. But you'll never win McClellan. You'll have to break him. And you'll never win this war until all the men in power, civil and military, recognize you as leader. What's that ode of Horace's—'You must have a heart thrice bound with bronze'—chill your heart, dear Abra'm."

He listened carefully. Mary, at her best, possessed acumen that he dared not question. She dropped her hand from his buttonhole. He nodded and turned away. Mary returned to the Blue Room.

The beautiful October days marched steadily toward the rains of November. Washington was so packed with the military, that, to the casual observer, it would seem that the political significance of the sprawling, half-built little city was entirely submerged. It seemed so, in very fact, to Lincoln as he strove in vain to move McClellan toward the Rebels.

Day after day slipped by,—the wonderful clear days of Potomac autumn, with the sound of northing geese at night, sailing high under the frosty stars,—but not until the 31st of the month, with the first November rain softening the clay roads of Maryland and Virginia, did McClellan send word to the President that he was about to make a strong reconnaissance up the Potomac toward Leesburg.

It was not much, but better than nothing, thought Lincoln, and set himself patiently to await results. Perhaps, perhaps the Rebels would face McClellan in battle. But in spite of the President's hopes, the reconnaissance would have been only a reconnaissance had not General Stone, in crossing the river, stumbled upon a fight. A light engagement followed in which 49 Union men were killed, with 200 wounded and missing. There was about an equal loss on the Rebel side with no gain to either.

Lincoln received word of the skirmish in the war office, with keen hopes that it might develop into a battle of decisive proportions. But McClellan ordered the reconnaissance withdrawn, and, to the President's bitter disappointment, the old stalemate recommenced.

The morning after the battle, Nicolay brought in a pile of newspapers.

"That may have been only a skirmish at Ball's Bluff, from the military point of view," he remarked to the President, "but politically it was a holocaust."

Lincoln was learning not to read the papers for news. "Do I have to hear that, George?" he asked.

Nicolay nodded. "Greeley demands that this inconsequential waste of blood and treasure cease. Seems that many of the 49 boys who were killed were socially very prominent in Massachusetts and New York. They are frantic over what they term the useless sacrifice of Senator Baker. It's another Bull Run, I guess."

"Baker was one of my dearest friends," said Lincoln, "but I don't think his blood was one ounce more precious than that of one of those poor boys who never put foot in the Senate, or in Massachusetts or New York."

Nicolay nodded. "Of course! But one can't make political capital out of that fact. As it is, our very best families are claiming that this would never have happened were you and General Scott not so hampering McClellan that he cannot make a decisive movement."

"I see!" Lincoln ran his fingers through his hair. "Well, I'm not sorry they're taking it that way. I think this will ease the old gentleman out of his job about as naturally as a fall flood moves one of those old log rafts that gets stranded on a sand bar. We'll see."

Nicolay blinked for a moment then, with a little smile, carried his pile of newspapers back into his own office.

Colonel Baker was given a military funeral in Washington. Willie and Tad, heart-broken over the loss of their friend, insisted that they would march in their uniforms with the soldiers, and not ride in the carriage with their father. And this they did, in spite of their mother's protest that they inevitably would get into trouble. As usual, she was right.

Late in the afternoon, about an hour after the President had returned from the funeral, William Russell appeared at the sitting room door, a boy holding either hand. Miss Ford and Mary were sitting by the table, embroidering, and awaiting the announcement of supper. Lincoln, passing through on his way to his room, pulled up with a sharp exclamation.

"Trouble, eh?"

Russell advanced into the light with the two boys. His eyes looked angry, yet he was smiling. He was, as usual, well groomed, but the children's uniforms appeared to have been replaced by dirty rags. Tad had been crying but Willie showed no traces of tears. He looked at his father.

"Papa day, I was ashamed of America, this afternoon. I was."

"What did she do?" asked his father, gravely.

"Well, it was like mother said, we couldn't march good with the soldiers. So we ran ahead of the parade to find a good place to watch. And in front of Mr. Russell's windows, Mr. Russell, he was standing with the crowd on the curb. So we pushed in and stood beside him. And when the gun carriage went by, with Uncle Baker in it, why, Mr. Russell took off his hat, and made us take off ours. And nobody else did, and then, when your carriage went by, Mr. Russell took off his hat again, and made us too, but nobody else did."

"We didn't want to, so awful much, just for you, Papa day," interjected Tad, wiping his nose on his bloody sleeve.

"Shut up, Tad! I did too, only I always forget. And a big tall man next to Mr. Russell said, 'What in hell you think you are!' "

"That was because Mista 'Ussel said in a loud voice," amended Tad, "that we'd gotta show a gentleman's 'espect fo' the dead, and fo' the head of the United States."

Willie scowled. "If you don't keep quiet, Tad, I'll hit you. And Mr. Russell said to the man, 'I think I'm a man that has better manners than you have.' And some one of the crowd said, 'That's the bloody Britisher that called our soldiers cowards when he wrote to his home paper about Bull Run.' And somebody else yelled, 'Bull Run Russell!—He rotten-egged our soldiers! Tar and feather him!' And some one hit him, and we all began to fight. And us, Taddie and me and Mr. Russell, licked the whole gang. Then he went in and got cleaned up, but we couldn't because we all wanted you to see our honorable scars."

"The blessed babies!" murmured Mary, then aloud, "But what were you ashamed of, Willie, the Americans' bad manners, or the fact that a Britisher and two boys licked them?"

"Of the licking," replied Willie promptly. "Just look at this scratch on my arm, mother."

"My nose has bled all oveh my gullet," observed Tad.

"Gullet! Why gullet?" asked Mary, examining her youngest's tattered shirt, with a sigh.

"A gullet is a kind of coat solda's used to weah, motheh," explained Tad.

"He means a doublet," explained Willie. "There, Mr. Russell, I told you mother wouldn't be mad if you brought us in. Come on, Tad, let's get cleaned up."

"I think Russell is the one that's mad," said Lincoln, giving the war correspondent a keen look.

"It was an humiliating experience." Russell shook his head. "I am convinced that the hue and cry raised against me will end my usefulness to my paper in this country. McClellan dare not give me a correspondent's privileges. And all because I gave what McClellan and McDowell both declare are the plain facts about that wretched rout of your troops at Bull Run. I'm hissed in the streets. My life is threatened daily."

"I don't understand it," exclaimed Miss Ford.

"That's simple." Lincoln sat down by the table and unfolded a crumpled paper which he took from his pocket. "At first our own reporters told the truth too. That made the public so mad that all the papers began to backwater. Pretty soon everybody's vanity about the Army of the Potomac was being bolstered by regular doses of taffy. Then along came a copy of Russell's letter to the London *Times,* once more calling attention to our disgrace. So there's nothing to be done, but call Russell every kind of a liar."

"The newspapers of this country are terrible!" exclaimed Mary.

"M. Mercier remarked to me the other day," said Russell, "that he supposed that I was going to stay in Washington forever, because the New York papers all were announcing that I was leaving immediately for London!"

"I don't think people are so sensitive about what they call your errors in what you wrote." Mary looked at the Englishman, thoughtfully. "It was the tone you used. It didn't sound friendly. You wrote *de haut en bas.* What we need is a breath of strengthening sympathy from old England, not to be looked down on and sneered at by her."

Russell flushed darkly. After a short pause, he said, "Perhaps I deserve that, Mrs. Lincoln, but it's very difficult, really, to write in praise of conditions one knows to be needlessly bad. As for sympathy! The Federal government will get none of that from Great Britain, until it declares this to be a war to end slavery."

"Why do you say that, Mr. Russell?" demanded Miss Ford, "when you know perfectly well that the South and England are inherently sympathetic,—always have been."

Lincoln cleared his throat. He had no desire to listen again to a discussion of slavery. Ever since Frémont's proclamation had been abrogated, he had been hounded by Abolitionists. "Speaking of sympathy," he began, hastily, "I had a very great pleasure to-day. It seems that John Hay isn't the only poetic genius in the Executive Mansion. Willie dropped this into my pocket this noon." He put on his spectacles and with his charming intonation he gave them Willie's first poem:

LINES ON THE DEATH OF COLONEL BAKER

There was no patriot like Baker
So noble and so true;
He fell as a soldier on the field
His face to the sky of blue.
His voice is silent in the hall
Which oft his presence graced;
No more he'll hear the loud acclaim
Which rang from place to place.

No squeamish notions filled his breast
The Union was his theme;
No surrender and no compromise
His day-thought and night's dream.
His country has her part to pay
To'ards those he left behind;
His widow and his children all
She must ever keep in mind.

The tears were running down the President's cheeks as he finished. He smiled however at the little round of applause and at Mary's excited demand to see the paper. He handed it to her with the remark:

"By jings, there's more than uncombed snarls in that boy's head!"

Supper was announced at that moment. Lincoln rescued the paper from Mary, and lagged behind the others to read the verses to Louis, who wiped his eyes and blew his nose.

"Can't say, sir," he said huskily, "whether I'm crying over Colonel Baker or Willie."

"Same here!" agreed Lincoln. "I wish Baker could hear the verses, himself, don't you, Louis?"

"I do, indeed!" agreed the messenger.

CHAPTER XV

THE STRUGGLE FOR SUPREMACY

GENERAL SCOTT, to Nicolay's complacent amusement, called on the President, a few days after Baker's funeral, and formally tendered his resignation.

"I am tired, sir," said the old soldier. "I am old, and I suffer continuously from an old hurt. Also, I suffer, Mr. President, from the insubordinate spirit shown me by General McClellan. I might almost say that he heaps contumely upon me."

Lincoln was much touched. "When I consider your years, your infirmities, and your well-earned glories, General, my conscience smites me for the heavy burdens I have imposed on you, lately. But, my dear General, where was I to turn? There is no one else in these United States in whose military judgment I have such confidence. I can accept your resignation only on one consideration, that you agree that I may come to you at any time for advice."

Scott's downcast face brightened. "Certainly, sir! You do me honor, Mr. President. It is with deep regret that I withdraw in such momentous times from the orders of a Chief Executive who has treated me with distinguished kindness and courtesy."

"Even at that, I couldn't keep your pace, General!" Lincoln smiled. In a moment, he told himself, he'd be pulling his forelock. "And now, sir, before you leave, I wish to tell you that I've actually sent General Frémont his walking papers. I still think well of Frémont's impulses, I only think he is the prey of wicked and designing men, and I think he has absolutely no military capacity. There'll be another scream from the radicals, I suppose, over the dismissal, but that has to be."

"Your decision is wise, sir. It's a pity you have to make these changes, continually, but it is one of the many prices we pay for maintaining no standing army. I hesitate to say it, sir, and would not, if I were not out of office, that I believe that, while Cameron was a wise political choice, he is not well fitted to be Secretary of War."

Lincoln nodded, a little heavily. Cameron was a charming gentleman, and he liked him. But the public suspected him of being swayed by the money interests, and it was true that he lacked the executive ability needed for the present emergency.

'I'm thinking about putting Edwin M. Stanton in his place," he said, watching Scott's face.

The General blinked and coughed. "An able and irascible man, sir, and your very vociferous enemy."

"Shucks! Mighty few who aren't my enemies, General. His integrity is only equaled by his intelligence. And the public has confidence in him. Folk are uneasy, these days, and they have a right to be. Think him over, and I'll come up to talk to you about him soon." He took the old man's hand. "I'll see that you are kept informed of what goes on down here. I'm sorry not to be able to give you full relief but we still need that wise head-piece of yours. So, while officially, I say, Good-by!—unofficially, what's your New Jersey address?"

General Scott smiled, delightedly. "I'll see that you receive it, Mr. President, as soon as Mrs. Scott and I are settled."

And Lincoln noted, with satisfaction not unmixed with a tender sort of sympathy, that the old soldier's limp was less as he left the office than it had been when he came in.

The pressure brought to bear on Lincoln to place McClellan in Scott's position was almost unbelievable. McClellan was an ardent Democrat. Yet Greeley, the Republican, gave Lincoln no rest in his behalf, and the Northern Democrats, with Raymond of the New York *Times* as their mouthpiece, hounded him editorially, while literally thousands of telegrams demanded McClellan as General-in-Chief.

More than all else, his anxiety to unite the uneasy North in a vigorous war spirit moved Lincoln to make the appointment. A sigh of relief and approval went up from the whole country, when he announced McClellan's promotion; a sigh so deep and full, that even the anger of the Abolition forces over Frémont's dismissal, which Lincoln adroitly permitted to become known at the same time, could not seriously impair the President's momentary popularity with all sides.

Lizzie Keckley, about the first of November, reported to Mary that Miss Ford, who had spent a week-end ostensibly with friends in Baltimore, had actually attended a celebration of some sort, at the tavern at Fairfax Court House. The host of this celebration, Jinny had told Lizzie, was a dashing and "powerful smart" Rebel officer, Captain Mosby. The purpose of the celebration was confused in Jinny's mind. She thought that the Battle of Ball's Bluff was the cause. Yet she had heard her mistress propose a toast to General McClellan, the hope of both North and South.

Mary tried to talk this toast over with Lincoln one morning in November, when she caught him alone for a moment at supper. But he was sweating that day under the first news of the intricate problem developing with England, as a result of the Trent affair, and he begged her not to bother him. Mary remarked that she would never mention McClellan's name to him again, but was glad the next moment, as she realized what deep harassment lay in his eyes, that Lincoln probably had not heard her peevish retort.

He had not. Nevertheless, Mary's constant jabbing him with her dislike for McClellan did not leave him unperturbed. Now and again, after she had launched one of her darts at the General, he was conscious of a strange sense of helplessness, a fear that the treachery which lurked in every aspect of the slavery question was too gigantic for his mind to grasp. McClellan's careless contempt toward himself, his frank scorn of the Cabinet members, which was shown most bitterly toward Cameron, made Lincoln uneasy.

The "Anaconda" plan, backed by Scott, the Cabinet, and himself, McClellan ignored. The plan of movement for the armies in Tennessee and Kentucky, as well as those in the States along the Mississippi, which Lincoln had worked out, and which were later to be proved models of military and political skill, McClellan laughed at. Men of real ability were emerging from the chaos in the middle-west, Sherman, Thomas, Hunter, Halleck. Lincoln desired that their talents be put to work at once. They were not.

Again, and yet again, during the early days of November, the President urged his plans on McClellan, but they were ignored. Nothing happened. A black lethargy seemed to hold the army East and West in a nightmare's spell. At last, Lincoln no longer could endure McClellan's silence. One evening toward the middle of November, he gathered up John Hay, led him across the street to Seward's house, gathered up the Secretary of State, and started for McClellan's house on H street.

"Of course," remarked Seward, puffing good humoredly on his usual cigar, "I like to be a good fellow, myself, but why, with all you and I have to do, to say nothing of our young poet, should we wait on McClellan? I've got to get that reply to Lord Russell on the Trent affair into Lord Lyon's hands to-night. You've torn it limb from limb, and time will be needed to put the remnants together, Mr. President!"

Lincoln laughed and flung his arm over Seward's shoulders. "We go to McClellan, Governor, because McClellan is too proud to wait on a couple of old cart horses like you and me."

"McClellan is a brilliant soldier, and I love him," commented Seward, "but he's riding a horse several hands too high, I fear."

"If he's as able as a military man as I guess him to be *un*able as a politician, he'll end the war before he ruins the country,—I hope."

Seward gasped. "And what do you mean by that, Lincoln?"

"Just what I said," replied the President.

There was silence, while the three men tramped thoughtfully along the tree shadowed street, so badly lighted that they were obliged to move slowly. John Hay, who felt keenly McClellan's discourtesies toward Lincoln, broke the silence, and changed the subject.

"Mr. Lincoln, may I ask how you got rid of that committee of Senators, this afternoon? They asked for an hour with you, and they came tumbling out in twenty minutes."

"Senator Trumbull and his gang, eh? They didn't want much! Just said they heard I was going to change the Secretary of War, and that, as the entire Cabinet had lost the confidence of the country, they thought it an opportune moment to change all seven of the Cabinet ministers. I couldn't think of a better answer than to tell them a story. I told it and they left."

"What was the story?" asked Seward.

Lincoln chuckled. "Out on the Sangamon, there was a farmer much troubled by skunks, and his wife insisted he try to get rid of them. So, one moonlight night, he loaded his old shotgun and stationed himself in the yard. Waiting in the house, his wife heard the gun go off and in a few minutes, the farmer came in.

" 'What luck did you have?' said she.

" 'I hid behind the woodpile,' said he, 'with the shotgun pointed toward the hen roost, and along came, not one skunk, but seven! I took aim, blazed away, and killed one. But he raised such a fearful stink I concluded it was best to let the other six alone!' "

The trio was still chuckling when McClellan's home was reached. The servant told them that the General was attending a wedding. Lincoln declared in favor of waiting, and led the way into the parlor. An hour later, McClellan appeared in the hall, where the three visitors heard the servant apprise him of Lincoln's presence. McClellan brushed by and ascended the stairs. Another quarter of an hour passed. Then the President sent the servant to remind General McClellan of his presence. Much embarrassed, the man returned almost immediately.

"The General has gone to bed, sir, and sends word that he's too tired to see you to-night."

"Good God!" exclaimed Seward, starting to his feet.

Lincoln laid his hand on the Governor's arm and smiled gravely at John Hay. "Come, boys, we'll go home," he said.

He did not speak during the return to the Executive Mansion.

And he was in no amenable mood when, about eleven o'clock that evening, Miss Ford came into his office. She and Mary had been to the theater, and while Mary went to see that the children were properly in bed, the Virginian embraced the opportunity to drop in on him. She wore an evening gown of green velvet, trimmed with many yards of green beaded fringe. A little green silk hood covered her hair. She removed this, as she sank into a chair by the fire.

Lincoln looked up, pen in hand.

"Mr. President, I've never had a chance to tell you how grieved I was that you and young Gordon, whom I sent to you, didn't seem to agree."

"You put it mildly, Miss Ford!" Lincoln smiled grimly.

She returned the smile. "I reckon that's best, isn't it? Are you still cross at him, Mr. Lincoln?"

"Did he give you an inkling of what happened?" asked the President.

"No, sir, but John Hay did. I'm so sorry. Not only that Gordon annoyed you, but that he's made it difficult for me to ask you a favor for his brother, Nathaniel P. Gordon."

"Don't know the fellow!" declared Lincoln. "What's he done? Run away from sentry duty?"

"No! Nothing so simple as that! He's been convicted as a slave trader by the New York courts, and the fool of a judge has sentenced him to be hanged!"

"Why not?" demanded Lincoln, tangling his legs in the rounds of his chair, and smoothing his hair with an ivory paper knife, while he wondered just what sort of an admission the Virginian was now trying to pry from him.

"It's not fair!" she cried. "Some Abolitionist district attorney has invoked that old law of 1820, prohibiting slave trade. It never has been enforced. Why should those devilish Abolitionists be allowed to make political capital out of this poor fellow? Convict him, and you ought to convict a hundred others."

"Why not?" repeated Lincoln, wearily.

"Because it's an absurd law, absurdly applied. And Gordon has a wife and baby."

Lincoln gave her a long, wistful look. "My dear Miss Ford," he said, sadly, "this is a sorry sort of business for you. You were meant for higher work, surely. You knew before you came in that your request was an improper one, an affront to all I hold sacred. The Attorney General's office is the proper place for you to go, anyhow."

The Virginian flushed deeply, and there was softness in her violet eyes that Lincoln never before had seen there.

"Does it make any real difference to you, Mr. Lincoln?" she asked, clasping her hands.

"Certainly it does," he replied stoutly. "I hate to see a friend go on the wrong track. . . . Now don't waste your time and mine on Gordon. A slave trader just isn't human, according to my notions."

"But you don't understand one angle of this, Mr. Lincoln. You have made a dangerous enemy in the younger Gordon. If you reprieve his brother, he will be your friend. And I tell you, young Gordon is *dangerous*. The story of what you did to him has gotten out, and he is being laughed out of Washington."

"By jings!" exclaimed Lincoln, wonderingly, "I reckon it's foreordained you and I are not to understand each other. Now I don't see how a *lady* of intelligence could say such a thing to me!"

"I understand you, well enough," retorted Miss Ford, half bitterly, and half sadly. The flush slowly lifted from her face, leaving it very pale in the firelight. "I sometimes wonder," she said, with even more than her usual drawl, "if this is not my punishment: to have grown to understand you so well. You are a very fine human being, Abraham Lincoln."

"Well," his eyes twinkling, "I reckon I'm fine enough not to run to cover when Gordon shakes his pen at me.

It's getting pretty late, Miss Ford, and I've still a day's work to do."

He nodded at her and turned back to his desk, hoping that she would go without further remarks. If she was now determined to try the personal rôle with him,—well, he'd give her no chance, that was all.

He began to write. He was working on a bill for the Delaware legislature, a bill for the gradual and compensated abolishment of the slaves of that State. A Member of Congress from Delaware had given him hope that the bill might go through, for Delaware was really more Northern than Southern. Miss Ford did not move, and finally conscious of that fact, he looked up to say:

"What would you and your friend Jeffie Davis say if I try to get through a bill for compensated abolishment in the various State legislatures?"

"I'd say what you said to me, a short time ago, or words to that effect, 'How can a man of your intelligence be such a fool'?" Miss Ford's voice had all its old sardonic flavor.

Lincoln chuckled and returned to his work, forgetting the Virginian again, but with his mind not wholly given over to the abolishment of slavery. One corner of his brain was repeating a warning to him that he knew he ought to heed: that McClellan's last affront was an insult which he could ignore if he wished as far as it was meant personally, but which he had no right to condone, inasmuch as it was an insult to his high office. He ceased to write and stared into space.

He did not see Miss Ford when she trailed from the room. John Hay put his head in the door with a question, and when Lincoln did not answer, said to some one behind him, "The Tycoon must be making war medicine." Old Daniel came in to turn out the light, said "Good evening! Beg pardon," and tiptoed out, and still

Lincoln did not rouse from his preoccupation with McClellan. Mary came, about two o'clock, and taking him by the hand, led him to bed.

The following morning shortly after breakfast McClellan's aide appeared with the information that the General-in-Chief would be glad to see the President at his house, where the Secretary of the Navy wished to hold a conference on an expedition against New Orleans.

Lincoln was sitting at his desk, with Willie beside him. He was helping the boy compose a letter to the editor of *The National Republican,* to whom he wanted the youngster to send his poem on Colonel Baker.

When the aide had delivered his message, Lincoln affixed an elaborate title line to Willie's verses before he said shortly:

"Tell McClellan I'm not coming."

The aide raised his eyebrows, saluted, and departed. Willie turned to stare up into his father's face.

"What are you mad at McClellan for, Papa day?"

"What makes you think I'm mad, Willie?" asked Lincoln.

"Ho! I always know. Anybody does. And you'd ought to have been mad at him long ago, I guess." The child, with his moving likeness to his father, nodded his head, deliberately. "I heard Mr. Sumner tell Miss Ford it was nauseating the way you let McClellan sauce you. Papa day," very thoughtfully, "why doesn't Miss Ford want you and Mr. Sumner to be friends?"

Lincoln gave the boy a keen glance. Willie, always old for his age, had matured astoundingly since March.

"I reckon you're biting off more than you can chew on that guess, Willie."

"No, I'm not, Papa day! You see I do sentry duty in uniform every week at mother's tea in the Blue Room. I have to walk up and down the hall, and watch all the folks that go in. And Miss Ford stands by the curtains that hang over the hall door, to meet folks and introduce them to mother. And all I have to do is to stand still on the hall side of the curtain, and I can hear everything she says. And twice I've heard her tell things to Mr. Sumner that would make him think you was his enemy."

"For instance!" Lincoln's thoughts took a leap. He recalled being conscious that the Senator from Massachusetts lately had been harshly critical, less helpful. Better call him in on this Trent affair. Knew more about English thought than Seward,—had the confidence of the English people after his years of residence there. Sumner would be a better man to visit London now than Thurlow Weed, Seward's choice—

Willie was going on. "She said that you didn't 'preciate mother's brain. She said you left mother alone too much. She said she guessed you didn't think much of mother and Mr. Sumner always talking French together. She said she knew from living intimately here, that you never would back up an,—you know,—a law for setting the slaves free. And she said you were the smartest politician in America and would listen to anybody, and use anybody, and then throw them away."

"You have a good memory, boy," said Lincoln.

"She said lots more I don't remember and those ain't the exact words," admitted Willie.

"She's tutoring you boys in what—reading, writing, and 'rithmetic?" asked his father.

"Not arithmetic, Mr. Langley does that. She's giving us elocution lessons, writing, French and German. She does know a lot for a woman, doesn't she, Papa day!"

"She's a queer mixture," mused the President. "Guess maybe she's a trouble maker, and I'd better get your mother to send her home."

"I don't know what mother'd do without her. She keeps company going for mother, and she's awful nice to us boys. I like her, only I wish she didn't talk that way. Now, if mother has anything to say, she speaks right out in meeting. Folks get mad at her, but they always get over it, because she's—she's—"

"Open and above board." Lincoln helped him out. "That's right, we can all trust dear little peppery mother."

Father and son nodded their heads in comfortable unison. "I tell you what, Papa day, mother's awful sharp about finding folks out. If you try to make her get rid of Miss Ford, she'll raise Cain, I suppose. But if you give her time she'll find Miss Ford out and tend to her, herself. Gosh"—with a chuckle—"hope I'm there when things bust!"

Lincoln joined in the chuckle, reminiscently. "All right, Willie, we'll let it stand that way for a while. In the meantime,—yes, what is it, John?" as young Hay came in.

"Brigadier Van Vliet of McClellan's staff, sir, wishes for a few moments' interview."

"It's lesson time for you, Willie, so march," said Lincoln, kissing the child several times, and watching him, with tender, brooding gaze until the door slammed after him. "Show the Brigadier in, John," rising to warm his hands at the fire.

A handsome, upstanding officer clanked into the room and saluted. Lincoln pulled the gray shawl over his shoulders, and deliberately lifted a foot in rumpled wool sock and carpet slipper to the blaze.

"I feel these first fall days more'n I will the real winter, Brigadier," he remarked.

The officer nodded, with a supercilious glance at the shabby legs dangling before the blaze; which glance did not escape the President's eye.

"Mr. President, General McClellan believes that you did not understand the purport of his previous message. This is the conference which you yourself called with regard to the military and naval plan which you, yourself, sponsor."

"I called last night at General McClellan's house to talk that plan over with him, Brigadier."

"Yes, sir?" The officer's voice was tentative.

"That's all, Brigadier. Fine clear weather we're having! Good fighting weather I'd call it. Virginia roads are in prime condition for marching."

Brigadier Van Vliet flushed, saluted, and turned away. There was no smile on Lincoln's face, as he watched that stiff back disappear into the reception room.

He was deep in conference with Seward and Chase over the floating of a new bond issue, not long before the noon hour, when George Nicolay came in.

"General McClellan is in my office, sir, demanding to see you, at once."

"Tell him I'm busy, George," replied Lincoln.

Chase spoke quickly, "I'm sure Governor Seward and I will both gladly withdraw in favor of the General."

"I'm not so sure, Chase, of that fact," said Seward, placidly turning over a pile of notes.

"The subject of this conference is in my province, sir," Chase threw his handsome head up quickly, "and if I am willing to end it you have nothing to say."

"Still strong for McClellan, aren't you, Chase!" interpolated Lincoln a little wearily. The friction between Seward and Chase made a consultation with the two extremely wearing. "It won't hurt him to cool his heels for a while."

"If he cools them!" smiled Seward. Adding as the door burst open, and McClellan strode in, "Which he won't!"

"Mr. Lincoln," demanded the General, "why am I subjected to the sort of treatment you have visited on me this morning?" He stamped up to the table, and paused opposite Lincoln, his gloved hand caught in his yellow sash, the other thrust into the breast of his blue uniform, a picture of the perfect officer.

"You know, McClellan, I didn't have a West Point education," replied the President, "so I'm lacking in a certain polish of manner I could have got there. My wife says she's about given up my manners, in fact, so I'm looking elsewhere for my training. Now you are a West Pointer and a society man, and I've decided to pattern my etiquette after yours for a while."

He paused, watching the young General through half-closed, steel gray eyes. Anger and resentment struggled to free themselves from the tight grip of McClellan's lips. Lincoln brought his bony fist down on the Cabinet table.

"You insulted the high office vested in me, last night, General. Don't repeat the offense, sir." He turned to Nicolay, who had remained standing near the door. "George, send for Welles to come over here. You gentlemen will excuse me, won't you, if I take up another matter now?" looking from Seward to Chase.

Seward, with a twinkle in his fine eyes, replied meekly, "Yes, Mr. President," and rose.

Chase, who was a great admirer of McClellan's, obviously was bursting to speak up for his favorite, but something in Lincoln's eye which he never before had observed there, caused the Secretary of the Treasury to gather up his papers and depart in utter silence.

McClellan walked to a window and stood with his back to the room. Lincoln wrote busily for a little while. Then he said urbanely:

"By the way, General, I see you've refused to make good my appointment of Halleck in Frémont's job. Guess you'd better tend to that, hadn't you?"

Without turning, McClellan replied, "I've got a better man in view. In the meantime, Hunter will do."

"Halleck," said Lincoln, "is a man of more war experience than yourself. He has had long training in organization. He is an authority on military art and science, as his book proves. Some one has got to get those fellows out West to pulling together,—or their armies will eat their own heads off. Scott wanted Halleck to have your job, but I agreed with the public that your youth and general brilliancy were a better bet. The conditions in the West are bad. You need Halleck there."

McClellan whirled round. "You try my patience beyond my strength, Mr. Lincoln."

"Oh, you're a pretty strong fellow, according to my guess!" Lincoln smiled. "Reckon you'd better fix that up with Halleck, George."

McClellan began to walk the floor. "You turn over to me a mob of gutter-snipes and farm boys to make into an army; then you nag me continually, without waiting either for equipment or training, to give battle to the enemy. Next you turn over to me all the armies of the country,—an untrained rabble,—honeycombed by the machinations of politicians, and demand again that I close in on the Rebels, at the same time handicapping me by imposing on me officers in whom I have no confidence. You, sir, utterly ignorant of the most ordinary military facts are doing this!"

"In a kind of a way what you say is true, George. But the fact remains that I'm the head of this government, and it's also a fact that two men can't drive the same horse at the same time."

John Hay opened the door to admit Welles and Cameron. In a moment, the four men were bending over a map, while Lincoln explained the theory of a joint land and naval operation that should open the Mississippi from Cairo to the Gulf. "Tightening up the Anaconda," he called it.

Cameron and Welles were enthusiastically for it. McClellan, with ill-concealed contempt, declared the plan to be premature, and that he would not detail a single regiment from the eastern forces for such a movement. There was a long argument, interrupted once or twice by different messengers sent by Mary to urge the President to come to dinner. During the last half hour, Lincoln permitted McClellan to do most of the talking, and it was with a sick feeling of anxiety that he listened. And yet, he thought, McClellan *was* brilliant, was not to be beaten in his skill as an organizer, and there was not a soldier in the Army of the Potomac who did not adore "little Mac." Once let him overcome his strange inertia, and his compact, loyal fighting unit would be unstoppable. But why that strange inertia? Mary said McClellan was a coward, but he was willing to take his oath that McClellan was a brave man.

Suddenly he rose, and ran his fingers through his hair. "I shall issue an order this afternoon," he said, "directing that preparations for the joint movement be begun at once. And now I'm going to my dinner. By the way, George," pausing with his hand on the door knob, "I shall have some special instructions for Halleck as soon as he takes over his job," and he closed the door firmly behind him.

CHAPTER XVI

THE VACANT CHAIR

MARY'S unremitting efforts to care for the President's health were abetted by Miss Ford as winter came on and the strain on him increased. Not that Miss Ford busied herself with the matter of his food and sleep. She kept to her own line, and saw to it that entertainments of a kind attractive to Lincoln were within his reach when he needed them most.

Mary watched her rather grimly, wondering how long her own patience would last. She had agreed with Lizzie Keckley that it would be best for her not to talk to Jinny, but to allow Lizzie to be the repository of all the information the colored girl could gather in.

Certainly Lizzie's gleanings were sufficiently varied to keep one far less vitally interested than Mary Lincoln on the *qui vive.*

Miss Ford wrote long letters to Horace Greeley and to Henry Raymond, purporting to report on the condition of the Slave Unionists in the South. Each letter, Jinny said, spoke a good deal about McClellan, and the growing confidence of the Slave Unionists in his ability as a soldier, and his fair attitude toward slavery.

Miss Ford was seeing a good deal of Senator Sumner at different houses to which they both were invited, and always told him any uncouth anecdotes she could recall or improvise regarding Lincoln's doings.

Mary flew into a fury at this last. Lizzie was washing her hair for her, and Mary jerked from her hands

With dripping head, she started for the door. "I shall attend to that hussy this moment," she cried through set teeth.

Lizzie ran to interpose her strong body between Mary and the scene which Willie had hoped to witness.

"Madam! Madam!" she pleaded. "So much depends on your keeping a still tongue. You *must* wait like the President said until we find out how much of a hold her people can get on General McClellan. If I can't trust you to keep your temper, who can I go to?"

"I'm a fool, Lizzie," replied Mary, shortly. "I'll do all my exploding to you. But," she added, as the dressmaker began to dry her hair, "I don't like her efforts at coddling Mr. Lincoln. That's my job. Isn't that his step now, in his room?"

Her question was answered by Lincoln's opening the door. He came in slowly and dropped down on the sofa.

"My head aches," he said, with a sigh. "Did I eat dinner this noon?"

"Yes, you did, Abra'm. You're worn out, that's what's the matter with you. Lie down and let Lizzie rub your poor head." Mary took the fan with which the colored woman was drying her hair. "Go to him, Lizzie."

Lincoln smiled up at Lizzie. "I haven't time, Lizzie. Senator Sumner is waiting for me now."

"Just let me give you five minutes, Mr. President," pleaded Lizzie. "I know I can help you."

"My tiredness is inside me, where you can't get at it," sighed Lincoln, "but just to prove that I'm taking care of my health!" He smiled again and lay back on the sofa.

Lizzie began to pass her fine hands over his forehead.

"I suppose Sumner is interested in that *Trent* affair," suggested Mary.

"Yes," murmured Lincoln.

"Abra'm, just what is that *Trent* affair? You never tell me anything any more," pleaded Mary.

"The *Trent* affair is my pet bug-a-boo, right now," groaned Lincoln. "It's not easy to explain. Two Americans sent by Jefferson Davis as envoys to England were forcibly taken off the British ship, *Trent,* by an American war steamer. In mistaken enthusiasm, Secretary Welles, the House of Representatives and the Northern press approved most vociferously of the act. England says that unless we return the prisoners within a given time she'll declare war, or words to that effect."

"Shall you do it?" asked Mary, eagerly. "You won't, Abra'm!"

"If I don't, England will fight us. If I do, it'll be the most unpopular thing I can force down the neck of the North. . . . We are wrong in the matter. It's the thing England did to us, and we went to war for it in 1812. . . . Lizzie, I feel as if I were getting nearer heaven every minute."

His eyelids drooped. The two women smiled at each other. Softly and more softly stroked Lizzie. After a moment she nodded. Mary gestured toward the hall door. "Guard it," she breathed, starting for the door into Lincoln's room.

For an hour the two women stood at their respective doors, fending away all comers. At the end of that time, Lincoln came over to kiss Mary, and made his way toward his office.

As he passed through the living room, Miss Ford was pouring tea for Charles Sumner. Otherwise the room was deserted.

"Where's everybody?" asked the President.

"It's too early for most people," replied Miss Ford. "I was trying to pacify the Senator until you woke up. I've got two sleight-of-hand performers who will do some tricks for us at five o'clock. I hope you won't miss them, either of you. They call themselves the Singing Jugglers."

"Oh, I've heard of them!" Lincoln exclaimed, eagerly. "We'll have to attend the show, eh, Charles!"

"I particularly dislike that sort of thing," grumbled Sumner. "It's certainly childish and in bad taste to have such people here, at this time."

"I'm the guilty party," declared Miss Ford. "The President doesn't smoke nor drink. He's got to have something cheering, or I'll not be earning my pay."

"You see, Senator, the women folks have a more kindly feeling for my foibles than my constituents," smiled Lincoln.

"I see!" Sumner was recovering his usual suavity. "William Russell says he's inclined to forgive you anything because you don't chew, Mr. Lincoln. I think the national tobacco-chewing habit has horrified him more than slavery."

"I'm inclined to sympathize with him," said Mary, coming in at the moment, very stately in black silk, and the red India shawl. "The naked beauty of the quid has never appealed to me. After the first levee, in the East Room, I had to have the carpet taken up and burned. It was viscid with tobacco juice. And have any of you visited Mount Vernon? The very walls are coated with brown spit. Faugh!"

"Where is Russell? I haven't seen him for a month and I'd like his comment on this *Trent* business," asked Lincoln, chuckling at Mary's wry face.

"He's hunting prairie chickens in Illinois," replied Miss Ford. "I do like these sporting Britishers. They're like Southern gentlemen."

"Too bad he has to hunt with Northern clodhoppers, isn't it?" snapped Mary. "For a sensible woman, you do say the silliest things, Miss Ford."

"I reckon I do!" agreed the Virginian, good naturedly.

"Charles," said Lincoln abruptly, "a lot of my friends, even Miss Ford here, have been urging me to send you to England on the *Trent* matter. But I'm not going to do it. I need you too much in the White House and the Capitol, to work on compensated abolishment."

Sumner, superb in his silver gray broadcloth suit, came to his feet and shook his beautifully kept, white hand in the President's face. "Compensated abolishment! More quibbling. More quibbling. Destroy it at a single blow! Cease to fear! Emancipate the slaves, and you end the war."

"This is a war to preserve the Union, not to end slavery!" cried Miss Ford, rising behind the tea table, and hurling the words at the Senator as though they were missiles.

"Woman, you lie!" roared Sumner, turning from Lincoln to give her the full force of his passion. His two fists shot toward the ceiling. "Slavery is the ruling idea of the rebellion. It is slavery that inspires every Rebel from general to trumpeter. It is slavery that speaks in the word of command and sounds in the morning drum beat. It is slavery that digs trenches and forts, pitches its wicked tents, and sets the sentries over against the National Capital. Wherever the rebellion shows itself, whatever form it takes, whatever thing it does, whatever it meditates, it is moved by slavery; nay, the rebellion is slavery itself, incarnate, living, acting, raging, robbing, murdering, according to the essential law of its being."

"Oratory!" sneered Miss Ford. "You said the same thing at the Republican State Convention at Worcester in October. But I, and many another, noted that only a few backed you when you urged that emancipation be placed in the party platform. The country is still sound as Mr. Lincoln will find, if he tries to stuff compensated abolishment down the throats of the border states. They'll spew it up." She paused, trembling with the force of her vehemence. Then, before Sumner could reply, she turned to the President.

"Where do you hope to get the money to pay owners for their slaves, Mr. Lincoln?"

Lincoln dug in the pocket of his snuff colored, baggy coat, and brought out a memorandum. "I worked this out last night," he said. "One half day's cost of the war would pay for all the slaves in Delaware at $400 a head. Eighty-seven days' cost of this war would free all the slaves in Delaware, Maryland, District of Columbia, Kentucky and Missouri. I wouldn't declare all the slaves free now, but by this plan I'd have each State adopt, now, a method by which the institution absolutely ceased in twenty-five years. See! Isn't that tender handling for you, Miss Ford?"

"No! I warn you, Abraham Lincoln, to keep your hands off our slaves as you would off our cattle or our houses." Her face quivered as she spoke.

Lincoln sighed. "I reckon, that, between you and Charles, I'll be ground to powder!" He returned the slip to his pocket. "Anyhow, Seward shall have his wish and send Thurlow Weed to England and France."

"A politician of his type certainly will make a bad impression abroad," exclaimed Mary.

"You'd say that Adams, our Minister over there, was their kind," agreed Lincoln, "but looks as if he hadn't got very far with Lord Russell. We'll try Weed's self-made manners. Charles, why don't you stay to supper and we'll thresh out this *Trent* affair. And Mary's French is languishing. I like to hear the two of you at it. It's almost as good as a trip to Paris, I reckon, for a backwoodsman like me."

He smiled at Sumner with such honest friendship that the senator smiled in return, as he said:

"Thank you, sir! Even though I can't approve of your half-hearted approaches to the problem, your attempts at compensated abolishment are better than nothing and I'll help you any way I can."

"Good! Thank you, Charles! Ah, Taddie, coming to the show?" as the boy wandered in, followed by Pensacola, harnessed to a small cart. "Where are Willie and Sumter?"

His query was answered almost before it was spoken by the arrival of Sumter at a dead run, barking wildly and dragging a wagon, in which was tied a much excited and loudly vocal black cat. In the endeavor of both dogs to attack the cat, several chairs and the tea table were upset. And before the mêlée ended, the jugglers arrived, followed by Hay and Nicolay, and a dozen others of the White House family.

Mary scolded, their father laughed immoderately. Miss Ford and John Hay helped to subdue the dogs. The boys indignantly tried to make their mother understand that they had not planned to make trouble, but that they had been staging a parade for the jugglers. Their mother melted at this, and rescinded her peremptory orders that they go to bed at once. Louis and Daniel cleaned up the mess, and the performance began.

Lincoln always was intensely interested in exploits showing physical dexterity because, he said, he possessed so little himself. He beguiled the leading performer into showing him the secret of the rabbit and hat trick, and, after perpetrating the trick successfully with Charles Sumner's respectable beaver, he urged them to continue their song program.

It was a peculiarly interesting scene; the huge oval room, with curtains drawn against the wintry night, the shabby, comfortable chairs, the table on which Mary's books crowded the vases of roses, fuchsias, lilies, she loved; the glowing fire, on one side of which sat Lincoln, with Willie on his knee, on the opposite side, his wife with Tad leaning against the red shawl; seated beside Lincoln, and a little back of him, Sumner tolerantly amused, Seward absent-minded and placid, "Father" Welles impatient, Mrs. Welles lovely and interested, pretty Kate Chase scornful, John Hay with his twinkling black eyes on Miss Chase. Grouped with Mary, Miss Ford, her eyes on Lincoln, Mrs. Seward tired and patiently impatient, George Nicolay interested, Cameron handsome and bland, a notebook on his knee.

Opposite the fireplace worked the jugglers, in black tights, doublets of silver, slashed with red, red velvet caps, each with a long black feather. They sang for Lincoln, in the cheap concert hall manner, several popular songs which did not hold the President's attention. Observing this, one of the singers cut short the rendering of "Seeing Nellie Home," and made an announcement.

"We have the privilege of singing for your Excellency the new and popular hit, The Vacant Chair, written by a friend to the memory of Willie Grout, killed at the battle of Ball's Bluff."

Even their nasal, mechanical voices could not entirely obliterate the appeal of that tender and sentimental ballad which hundreds were warbling, but which Lincoln had not heard. It was the sort of thing that always tore him:

"We shall meet but we shall miss him!
There will be one vacant chair.
We shall linger to caress him,
As we breathe our evening prayer."

He listened, with quivering chin. The song made almost unbearably keen his constant grief over the losses the war was bringing to America—this war!—these losses!—how long must they continue, before he dare risk placing in the hands of his countrymen an edict freeing the slaves?

"Makes me think of Uncle Baker!" sniffed Willie, and burst into tears.

Suddenly, the President bowed his great head on the boy's shoulder and wept with him. Mary flew to his side; there was a moment of stunned silence in the room, then, at a gesture from Miss Ford, the company slipped away, leaving the Lincolns alone before the fire.

CHAPTER XVII

THE FIRST WAR ORDER

WHILE moments such as that following the singing of The Vacant Chair added to the sum total of Lincoln's sadness, they at the same time afforded a relief to his tense nerves, that together with the laughter that preceded the tears, made it possible to endure without breaking the burden that daily grew more ghastly.

He found himself, later in the evening, able to discuss the irritating *Trent* affair quite calmly with Seward and Sumner,—that is to keep those two high-strung gentlemen as well as himself to a middle key. The net result of the evening was a letter to England that Sumner prophesied would satisfy John Bull's exacting diplomacy.

The prophecy, in the course of the month, proved itself correct, and, before Christmas, Lincoln had the satisfaction of seeing the two prisoners given up to Great Britain. It was a remarkable diplomatic victory, as none knew better than the President, but he had no time in which to glory in it.

William Russell, at a tea gathering in the sitting room, caught Lincoln, passing through, and congratulated him on what he had accomplished.

The President looked down on the Englishman with a smile. "It was good diplomacy, but bad politics, I reckon. Bigelow hits it off:

" 'We gave the critters back, John,
Cos Abra'm thought 'twas right.
It wa'n't your bullyin' clack, John,
Provokin' us to fight!' "

He gave the verse with great gusto and strode away, followed by Russell's jovial "Ha! Ha!"

No, even the threatened war with Great Britain had not pressed on him as heavily as his anxiety over McClellan. The young General was carrying things with a high hand, frankly looking on himself as the last military authority in the country. With grim far-sightedness, Lincoln, one by one, cleared away the obstacles about which he felt McClellan could complain legitimately. He seized on Cameron's indiscreet recommendation to arm the slaves, in the War Department's annual report, as a good reason for appointing him Minister to Russia. And one morning, early in January, he sent a communication to Edwin M. Stanton, over which John Hay dared utter a protest.

"Mr. Lincoln, Stanton hates you!" He swallowed hard like a schoolboy, disliking to bear tales, but urged thereto by an overwhelming sense of duty.

The President, observing his embarrassment, helped him out with rather a twisted smile. "Yes, he's the man who christened me the Illinois Gorilla. . . . He's a fellow capable of performing the biggest and the meanest deeds. The country knows him well, and has complete trust in his honesty, as I have, and he can do more to restore confidence in financial circles in the conduct of the war than any one in America. He's a Union Democrat. He's got an exceptionally good head-piece. But, most important of all, he's McClellan's dear friend. . . . As far as I'm concerned, I can hitch along with him, somehow."

John sighed. "Very well, sir! I'm silenced but not convinced." Then he looked up at the President, with his delightful twinkle. "What a wonderful wife you would make, Mr. Lincoln!"

The President doubled up with laughter, and John hurried off with the letter to Stanton.

But for all Lincoln's efforts and personal sacrifices, with the new head of the War Department giving him unprecedented coöperation, with the country clamoring more and more for action on the part of the Army of the Potomac, McClellan did not move. His invariable reply to all urging was that the enemy vastly outnumbered him, and that he still lacked certain essential supplies. Lincoln walked the floor, cajoled, ordered. Still the Army of the Potomac, a wonderful organization now of 150,000 men in the highest state of efficiency, lay quietly in the Virginia hills, "eating its head off."

McClellan began to be inaccessible to the President's messengers, and seldom appeared at the White House. Uneasy, Lincoln decided once more to visit McDowell, himself.

One clear afternoon, late in January, Lincoln, accompanied by William Russell, started ostensibly for a horseback ride, but immediately they were out of the White House grounds, Lincoln said to the war correspondent:

"William, let's go over Long Bridge and visit McDowell. I want to see if he realizes the bottom's going to drop out of everything unless that army moves."

"I'm *persona non grata* with Army Headquarters, you know, Mr. Lincoln, ever since the newspapers dubbed me 'Bull Run Russell.' "

Lincoln grunted. "McDowell himself told me your account was accurate—I suppose I have an occasional privilege of my job. Come along."

"I'd jolly well like to!" exclaimed Russell. "Thank you, sir."

Washington and the Virginia hills were beautiful under a light fall of snow, blue-white in the brilliant sun. Lincoln drew deep breaths of the scintillating air, and felt his spirits rise, as they always did under the open skies.

He was almost cheerful by mid-afternoon, when they reached Arlington Heights, and entered the house. An officer bowed them into one of the parlors, which seemed to Lincoln, blinking with snow dazzle, to be full of women. But, in a moment, he perceived that there were only Mrs. McDowell, Mrs. McClellan and—Miss Ford. There were highly polished floors, with rugs in soft colors, many spindly gold chairs and sofas—lace curtains, portraits, negro servants coming and going, the smell of coffee and whiskey.

"I say," murmured Russell, as an aide announced them, "headquarters does itself rather well!"

General McClellan, standing before the crackling fire, allowed the President to cross the room to greet him. He shook Lincoln's proffered hand, and bowed stiffly at Russell. As he took in the elegance of the scene, Lincoln deliberately turned backwoodsman.

"I reckon I'm as unexpected to you, George, as you are to me! I thought you were sick," he said, sinking gingerly onto one of the brocaded sofas and crossing his long legs. "What's going on, a church fair?"

McClellan flushed darkly. "May I ask, sir, what brings you here?"

"I thought maybe if I could catch McDowell alone," replied Lincoln, serenely, "I could surprise him into moving such of the army as he could control. And I'll make you a sporting offer right now, George! Since you don't want to use the Army of the Potomac, I'd like to borrow it, and set it to work on some of the plans I've been hatching."

The young general looked over to the tea table where Miss Ford and his wife were sitting. There was an exchange of looks among the three, and an ever-so-slight shrugging of McClellan's shoulders. None of this escaped Lincoln, who put his foot on the rung of a gold chair, took the little ivory paper knife out of his vest pocket and slowly rubbed his black locks with it, smiling inwardly as he thought of what Mary would say if she could see him.

After a long pause, McClellan asked, sardonically, "May I ask, sir, what you would do with the army?"

"I'd make it fight, George. That's what armies are for!" very gently. Then, suddenly, pointing the ivory blade at the general, he asked, harshly, "What's the mystery in your inertia, McClellan? You are not a coward, as far as I can discover! Your constant iteration that the enemy too greatly exceeds you in numbers is too trifling an excuse for a man of your intelligence. You know better. Come, what's the mystery?"

"By God, sir!" shouted McClellan, suddenly, "Don't try my patience too far, or you shall discover my strength. 'Borrow the army!' One of your puerile jokes, of course—but try it! Try it! See if one man would leave me to follow you."

"What General McClellan is boasting of, Mr. Lincoln," Miss Ford cut in a little breathlessly, "is the unparalleled affection his soldiers have for him. It really is remarkable,—unless one knows the general well,—the faith they have in Little Mac, the love they show him."

The President turned deliberately in his chair so that his long body in the gray riding clothes was facing the table. In so doing, he for the first time observed a young man who was standing behind her chair. It was "Obscene" Gordon. "Now where does that get us?" thought Lincoln. Then aloud, with a smile for Miss Ford, very magnificent in her black velvet riding habit, "And what else could I have supposed George meant, Sister Ford? There's nothing better than for a soldier to trust his general, far as I know. . . . By the way, McClellan," his eyes fastened grimly on "Obscene" Gordon, "it is clearly understood that no report of this afternoon's repartee goes to the newspapers. And while I think of it, Miss Ford, if by any chance you discover what reporter is writing to a certain New York paper, claiming that the Administration is considering commuting the sentence of the slave-trader Nathaniel P. Gordon, to satisfy the ardent pleas of Mrs. Lincoln, who, he alleges, is violently pro-slavery in her sympathies—if you discover him, tell him I'll do more than kick him next time I see him opportunely."

Lincoln rose slowly.

"Will you have a cup of coffee, Mr. Lincoln?" It was Mrs. McClellan's sole contribution to the "repartee."

"No, I thank you, Madam," Lincoln made his jerky bow and turned to McClellan, who still stood stiffly at the hearthrug. Something in the sturdy beauty and intelligence of the young general so renewed Lincoln's old yearning toward him that, for a moment, his uneasy suspicions were submerged.

"I hope you feel well enough to attend a war council Stanton is calling for to-night, George. It's his party. I'm just an invited guest."

"I have already written my acceptance, sir, to the Secretary of War," replied the general.

"Good!" commented Lincoln. "Well, Russell, shall we hit the highroad again?"

"Gladly, Mr. President," replied Russell who, throughout the interview, had stood behind Lincoln's chair, an elegant figure in a tweed riding suit, with high boots and spurs of a foreign cut.

The sun was well toward the west as the two mounted their horses and set off for home.

Lincoln reviewed the call, mentally, puzzling not a little over the presence at Arlington of Miss Ford and Gordon. His companion did not intrude on his thoughts, and it was not until they had again clattered on to Long Bridge that Lincoln asked, abruptly, "William, what's the matter with McClellan?"

The war correspondent replied promptly, "Too much adulation, sir, from every one. You, yourself, Mr. President, have contributed not a little to his surfeit of sweets."

"I thought he was too big to spoil," sighed the President. "But he's got a notion, it's obvious, that the Army of the Potomac is his personal bodyguard."

Russell laughed, then said with his usual fairness, "He's a competent engineer. His defense works around Washington are beyond criticism."

"He's only a *stationary* engineer, I'm getting to believe," grunted Lincoln, and changed the subject.

But during the remainder of the ride home, during dinner, with the Welleses and the Sewards as guests, he was pondering on McClellan—McClellan and Miss Ford—Miss Ford, McClellan and Gordon. During the war council, later, he permitted Stanton to take the lead in urging action, while still he studied the General-in-Chief. Stanton had derided Lincoln's assertion that no one could move George McClellan save the Almighty, whom alone McClellan admitted to be his superior. Stanton showed a little impatience toward his favorite, it is true, and was endeavoring, this evening, to move him, himself.

The council dragged through several hours' discussion of plans for an immediate move toward Richmond. For every suggestion, McClellan had the same reply, that the enemy too greatly outnumbered him for such tactics to be successful.

Toward midnight, when McClellan had made this reply for the fifth or sixth time, Stanton's fierce temper rose.

"By the eternal, what hallucination has paralyzed the Federal generals? Read this, sir." He walked over to his desk and, seizing a handful of telegrams, he handed McClellan one from Rosecrans, in West Virginia, asking for more troops.

McClellan read and sniffed disgustedly. "Nonsense, he doesn't need another man!"

"Read this, also, sir!" exclaimed Stanton, tugging with trembling fingers at his beard.

It was a telegram from Sherman insisting that 200,000 more men were needed in the West.

"The man is crazy!" was the General's contemptuous comment.

"I told you, Stanton," said Lincoln, "that George regards every man we sent to any other department as willful robbery of the Army of the Potomac."

"May I ask you, General," demanded Stanton, hoarsely, "what you intend to do with your army, and when?"

A disagreeable silence ensued, with Stanton pulling at his long-suffering beard, McClellan sitting bolt upright, his hand on his sword, with Lincoln looking in a troubled way from one to the other, as he nursed his left knee. He could see Stanton's furious temper rising. The last thing he desired was a quarrel between the two men, each so valuable, each so extraordinarily difficult.

"Have you a date in your own mind for a move, McClellan?" Lincoln urged.

"I have, sir," replied McClellan.

"Then, I shall adjourn this meeting, trusting you to divulge that date to us, in the immediate future," Lincoln said, ignoring the fact that Stanton had called the conference.

McClellan and McDowell left at once. Lincoln pulled his gray shawl over his shoulders, set a dilapidated tweed cap over his nose and faced his new Secretary of War with a brooding eye. Stanton pulled his spectacles off, and polished them with vicious force.

"Why did you interfere, Lincoln? We had got nowhere," he demanded.

"You and Little Mac are good friends, Stanton. I reckon it'll be better for the country if you stay so."

Stanton beat the war map which lay open on his desk with a muscular fist. "I ruined two of my good friends, to-day, whom Cameron had allowed to loot the treasury with fraudulent war contracts. George McClellan will use his great talents to push the war or he'll use them on his old job back with the Illinois Central Railway as a private citizen."

Lincoln sighed and walked into the next room, where the code telegraph operators were at work. He read through a sheaf of despatches from the West, then sat down at one of the desks and fell into a dark reverie. He was roused when the telegraph instrument before him began to sound, and young Bates reached over his shoulder to reply.

"Young man, I've hunkered you out of your seat, I guess," he remarked, rising.

"Thank you, Mr. President," said the young man. "This is the second time to-day you've given way to some one. I saw you step into the deep snow this morning on F Street to make room for a fat nigger wench."

"Did you?" asked Lincoln. "Maybe I did. I've made it a rule all my life if people wouldn't turn out for me, I'd turn out for them. You avoid collisions that way. Good night, boys!" And again in the dark reverie, he left for the White House.

He went directly to Mary's room.

"That you, Abra'm?" she asked, as he opened the door softly.

"Yes, Mary." There was no light in the room save the warm glow from the fire which lighted his wife's long chestnut braids, and touched her cheeks with delicate rose. He sat down at the side of her bed and took her hand. "Feeling pretty well? Like being here in Washington?"

Mary smiled. "I'm nicely, Abra'm, but I guess I enjoy Washington about the same way you do. How did the conference go, this evening?"

Lincoln shook his head, then asked, abruptly, "Mary, what do you think of Sister Ford now? I'm wondering if she's not brewing more mischief than we ought to stand for."

Mary sat up in bed. "What's she done, now, Abra'm?"

Lincoln told of his suspicions roused at Arlington and added, "Gordon's not her sort, or McClellan's either. They're just using him. But for what?"

"Something connected with keeping the slavery issue holy," retorted Mary, "as Charles Sumner would say. He's having a beautiful time, Abra'm, trying to make an Abolitionist of me."

Lincoln patted her hand. "Is he succeeding, my dear?"

Mary looked thoughtful. "Well, I find his arguments very persuasive. He is really very attractive to a woman who likes to use her brains. You know he corresponds with several highly cultured English and French ladies. His letters from the Duchess of Argyle are fascinating."

"It all helps him in his job," with a twinkle, from Lincoln.

"Aren't you horrible!" Mary laughed softly. "He and Miss Ford have quarreled, I believe. He says he no longer can ignore her attitude on slavery."

"Don't know but what I'm in the same boat," murmured Lincoln. "That new head of the National Detective Police, Colonel Baker, is an intelligent and tactful fellow. I reckon I ought to have a talk with him soon. Though, when you get right down to it, I haven't a great deal to tell."

"Have him talk to Jinny," suggested Mary.

"Though I admit that I dread to have him discover anything. She's wonderful with the boys. . . . As to your puzzle about her relation with McClellan, Abra'm, my public teas have shown me one thing. She and her clique, like all the rest of the world, are feeding his vanity until it's inevitable, unless he's terribly defeated on the battlefield, that he'll try to make himself either Dictator or President. And he'll never risk a real battle. I told you he is yellow."

"He's not yellow!" contradicted Lincoln. "He's young—very young—I wonder if he thinks if he dallies long enough the peace parties, North and South, can patch things up, saving both the Union and Slavery—No, he couldn't be such a fool!— What is it, Mary, what is it? Why won't McClellan move on Richmond?"

"He's a coward, and just now cowardice helps on his ambitions," promptly, from Mary.

"No! no, he's no coward! You don't help me by being vindictive in your judgments, Mary." He spoke almost pleadingly.

"My dearest husband, how can I not feel vindictive when I observe his insults to you?" asked Mary, rubbing her cheek affectionately against his arm.

Lincoln kissed her, then rose with a sigh. The puzzle was still unsolved.

He sent for Colonel Baker, the next morning, but the detective was off on a case that would not be finished for several days. Lincoln promptly forgot the matter and turned to putting through the first turn of what he called the thumb-screw method on McClellan. He issued his "War Order No. 1." As Commander-in-Chief of all forces, he ordered a general movement of the military and naval forces against the insurgents. Almost as an after-thought, he called a Cabinet meeting and told the members what he had done. The members, slowly learning that they must bow to Lincoln's solitary rule, did not, for once, resent his autocratic methods, but gave him general approval. Chase, who had begun to hate McClellan quite openly, was especially generous with his approval.

"At last!" he exclaimed. "Finally you've come to realize, Mr. President, that a coward has to be forced to fight."

"McClellan is no coward, sir," snarled Stanton.

"Give me proof of his bravery and I'll apologize, Mr. Secretary Stanton," sneered the Secretary of the Treasury.

Seward interrupted tactfully. "I'm ready to wager with any one that now we may bank on the Mississippi being open by the first of May."

"McClellan won't be ready to move by May," grunted Welles.

Lincoln, employing his usual method of keeping peace, turned to Postmaster General Blair, "I granted a pardon to young Jones but I'm not sure I should have. Of course he is a mere boy. His father put up a good argument for him. For that matter, the man whom I was talking to when you folks came in was a good talker. He, too, wanted to get a relative out of jail." He looked at the grim, impatient faces around the table with an irresistible twinkle in his fine gray eyes. "I tell you, gentlemen, we must abolish these courts! It's bad enough that they put so many good men in penitentiaries to get out, but now they've begun on the boys, that's too bad. And, according to the evidence that comes to me, they pick out the very best men to send to the penitentiary, and this boy Jones is a very good boy, too. The man who was pleading for his relative this morning, made me feel that Massachusetts must be a happy State, if her citizens who are out of jail are as virtuous as this one who is in. Yes, down with the courts, and deliverance to the victims!"

Attorney General Bates, smiling with the others, picked up a great stack of papers. "This seems to be a propitious moment, sir, to speak of Nathaniel P. Gordon, a slave trader. It was your friend Miss Ford who first brought him to my attention. But I've been bombarded since with pleas for and against his pardon. Undoubtedly, the Abolitionists are seeking to make an example of him."

"I know that case," interrupted Lincoln. "The man stinks to heaven with the aroma of his slave ship. This is his fourth offense—I wish such a blow to be struck at slave trading as will stamp it as dangerous and disgusting in the eyes of all seafaring men. Only hanging one of their fraternity will accomplish this."

Lincoln rose and, looking down at Bates, said in a voice husky with emotion, "I will reprieve him until the last day of February, so that he may prepare for the awful change awaiting him. On that day he must hang. Prepare the necessary document for me to sign, Bates, warning Gordon that, relinquishing all expectation of pardon by human authority, he refer himself alone to the mercy of the common God and Father of all men. That will be all for to-day, gentlemen." And he moved out of the room, his head bowed, his hands clasped behind his back.

CHAPTER XVIII

WILLIE

WAR Order No. 1 had no more effect on McClellan than the wind whistling over Arlington Heights. Several of his generals in the West and Southeast made spasmodic advances. Burnside and Goldsborough took Roanoke Island, the key to all the North Carolina coast defenses. Grant sprang into sudden fame by taking Fort Donelson on the Tennessee, a most important step toward the freeing of the lower Mississippi. Had these movements been backed wholeheartedly by McClellan, so that all the coils of the Anaconda tightened, the duration of the war undoubtedly would have been shortened by months if not by years.

But McClellan did not move.

Daily, Lincoln's uneasiness increased. What was McClellan's game? Did any one but McClellan know? Did Mrs. McClellan understand? Did any of their friends—Miss Ford?

He was signing a list of pardons when this thought came to him, one afternoon, in the middle of February. He looked up at John Hay.

"John, how does your 'settin' up' to Miss Ford progress?"

"Not rapidly, sir. The lady, I fear, finds Hay an insipid diet, preferring the roast beef of old England."

Lincoln chuckled. "I advised her once, myself, to take up with Russell. Is Russell really serious about her, John?"

"I believe not, sir. He takes her out a bit but I imagine his heart is on the other side of the water."

"John, I don't like her intimacy with the McClellans, knowing what I know of her beliefs. If I thought she really had an influence on him, on the peace-at-any-price-to-save-slavery side, I'd put her in the Old Capitol prison. As it is— Has Colonel Baker returned?"

"Not yet, sir! I'll see that he comes to you as soon as he gets back. How about some other detective——"

Lincoln shook his head. "There's too much politics in this thing for any but a broad gauge man. I'll wait for Baker. In the meantime, I reckon I'll face her, myself. Send her in here, John, then pray for me."

"You can take care of Miss Ford or any other woman, as far as I can observe," young Hay retorted imperturbably, as he hurried to obey the order.

Miss Ford came in with a look of inquiry in her violet eyes. She took the chair Lincoln placed beside his desk for her, pulling a little green knit cape about her shoulders. The White House was not well heated. Snow tapped steadily against the windows, and a bitter wind swayed the shades.

"Sister Ford," began Lincoln, then paused, wondering what on earth he was to say.

" 'Sister' is rather a recent acquisition," the Virginian smiled. "There are arguments both for and against it."

"I'm entirely for it," declared Lincoln. "It has a friendly sound. Sister Ford, what is it you desire most in this world,—to preserve slavery?"

She gave him a little smile. "Do you require a quite literal reply, Mr. Lincoln?"

"Yes!" replied the President, quietly.

"Do you mean what would I desire could I have my wish?"

"Yes. Be frank with me. Would it be McClellan's total quiescence until peace could be declared on a pro-slavery basis?" asked Lincoln, leaning toward her, earnestly.

"You mustn't put words in my mouth, sir! You must permit me to answer your questions freely, and, as I am a woman, that answer must be intensely personal." She drew a breath so tremulous that the buttons on her dress quivered. Her cheeks burned. Suddenly she leaned forward to place her hands on Lincoln's.

"Could I have my heart's desire, dear Mr. Lincoln, it would be that I be beloved by you as you are by me, and that, far from the madding crowd's ignoble fight, we'd be living for each other."

Lincoln gasped, "Good God!" and jumped to his feet. "Are you mad?"

As though stung to the quick by the surprise and disgust in his voice, Miss Ford rose so precipitately that her chair tipped over. Her voice was thick with passion. "Mad? Yes, mad, Abraham Lincoln, when I permit myself to think of you—your magnificent ugliness, your superb intelligence, your utter sweetness and your complete aloofness from all human contacts.—Ah, I have watched you month by month—"

"Stop!" thundered Lincoln. "You are a superb actress, Miss Ford, but you are wasting your talents on me. Take them to James Hackett. He'll be here next week. In the meantime, calm down and consider what you are saying."

"Have I considered anything else for six months?" demanded the Virginian, fiercely.

"Yes, ma'am! You have given deep consideration to George McClellan."

"With the top of my mind, yes. To you, my inmost soul."

Lincoln paused, uncertain whether to laugh or weep. He had no idea as to whether or not Miss Ford had any real feeling for him. It was not impossible. He had known many women. Not a few of them, for some reason endlessly mysterious to him, had made love to him.

He believed that the present scene, however, had been carefully rehearsed with an idea of carrying him off his feet. And yet, no anomaly of feeling, he told himself, was impossible to this woman. In no other had he observed such possibilities for a conflict of passions—mental, moral and physical.

Snow tapping on the window panes. Faintly from Pennsylvania Avenue, the sound of a funeral march,—some soldier going to his long rest. An unusual sense of weariness pressed on his heart. He raised a hand to rest on her green, wool-clad shoulder.

"Dear Sister Ford, what a wealth of talent to waste! Ah, my dear, don't waste it! Use it to help save the Union."

"To destroy slavery, you mean!" still fiercely.

"To save the Union, cleansed of slavery. Help me, Miss Ford!"

She looked up at him, nostrils dilating. "That? Never! Never!" She seized his hand, turned it and kissed the calloused palm, then moved away from him. "You are going against tremendous human forces and appetites, Abraham Lincoln."

He clasped his hands behind him and stood staring at her, a slow anger and antagonism mingling with pity in his heart. "Are you warning me or defying me, Miss Ford?" he asked.

"Either or both! The choice is yours, sir!"

Her handsome head in the air, one hand twirling the huge globe beside the table, it sunk in on Lincoln that hers was a terrible power, and that she had no place in the President's household. She had better go and that at once.

As if she sensed what was in his mind, she said in a natural, casual way, "I must get back to the boys. Dr. Stone says he's afraid both of them have a touch of typhoid."

Lincoln started as though she had struck him. Both boys had been in bed for a day or two, with what was supposed to be a bilious attack, following a children's party.

"Typhoid!" he exclaimed. "When did the doctor say that?"

"He had just told Mrs. Lincoln and me when you sent for me," replied the Virginian, her ruffled green skirts sweeping after the President, as he strode from the room.

Tad was drowsy with fever and wished only to drink cold water and to sleep, but Willie's blue eyes were brilliant. He asked his father to sit down and read Scott's Hunting Song to him.

Lizzie Keckley, in a comfortable white apron, was putting a cold towel on the boy's aching head. She smiled up at Lincoln.

"Don't look so upset, Mr. President. A little headache isn't going to worry this boy, is it, Master Willie?"

"Of course not!" exclaimed Willie. "Papa day, I want you to tell John Hay to take care of my pony. He's the only one that knows how a pony feels. And every morning till I get well, I want John to go down and talk to him."

"I'll see that John does it," replied Lincoln, picking up the little leather bound copy of poetry and sitting down beside the bed.

"Waken, lords and ladies gay,
On the mountain dawns the day;
All the jolly chase is here
With hawk and horse and hunting-spear."

Lincoln read the poem superbly. Willie was stilled as though a healing hand had allayed his misery. In fifteen minutes he was asleep. His father sat for a few minutes longer gazing at him, then he stole away, intending to find Mary and speak a word of comfort to her. She was in Tad's room with Miss Ford. Both women were leaning over the child's bed.

"You let Miss Fo'd hold me, Motheh," Tad was saying. "You must be ti'ed and she's so st'ong and comfable and she likes to hold me."

"You're a spoiled baby!" exclaimed Mary, tenderly, moving back with a little smile that was utterly without jealousy.

"Anything for her children's comfort, bless her dear heart," thought Lincoln.

Miss Ford lifted the boy easily, Mary wrapped the blanket around him and the Virginian crossed the room to the fire where she seated herself in a mahogany rocking chair and began to croon a darky lullaby. Mary caught sight of Lincoln, and followed him into the hall.

"She's a strange contradiction," he said.

"Yes!" sighed Mary. "The boys are never happier or more docile than when she's with them. Abra'm, do we have to send her away until the boys are well?"

"No! We'll hold off until then. But after that—" He shook his head. "This is hard news Dr. Stone gives us, darling Mary! Can it be real? The boys don't seem much sick."

"They aren't," replied Mary, cheerfully, "but they'll need careful nursing."

"Looks to me like they were getting it!" his anxiety lifting with Mary's manner. "I'll sit up with 'em tonight."

"You won't be needed, dear," replied Mary. "Save yourself for your big tasks. There's Charles Sumner looking for you now!"

The Senator, a great blue cape lined with seal thrown over his shoulders, came up with both arms extended, and stood holding one of Mary's and one of Lincoln's hands.

"Young Stoddard has just told me. What may I do to help? I am an excellent nurse, having had so much illness myself."

Mary smiled at him gratefully. "You and the President have your hands full, nursing a patient that's far sicker than our boys. I refer to your friend 'Compensated Abolishment.' "

Lincoln chuckled. "I reckon he is right sick but we're going to try to pull him out, eh, Charles?"

Sumner smiled. "If you can spare a moment, Mr. Lincoln, that's what I came to consult you about. I have had a letter from John Bright on the British state of mind, which I'd like to read to you. Compensated Abolishment will not bring the British to our side in this war. It would still remain a war of coercion, to their eyes. But come, let's read the letter."

Lincoln proceeded along the hall to his office and seated Sumner in the chair so lately occupied by Miss Ford. Mary was not worried about the boys but, somehow, his own anxiety was only half assuaged.

The next day, Taddie, was sharply sick. But after a few days, his fever began to lessen. The onslaught of the disease with Willie was mild, but day after day his fever rose, until one could see it consuming his vitality like an unquenchable fire.

A shadow settled over the White House. The work in the office went on at the same almost unendurable pace, but many times a day Lincoln abruptly left his desk, or excused himself from a conference, or turned away from the unending stream of importuning visitors, to walk hastily over to the children's rooms. There he would question the attending women for a moment, kiss each boy's little burning hand, and hurry back to his work.

People were, of course, astonishingly kind,—astonishing, at least, it seemed to Abraham and Mary Lincoln, who had been the recipients of such virulent unkindnesses during this year in the White House.

On the afternoon of February 20, Lincoln broke away suddenly from Stanton who was berating him, half sneeringly, for not enforcing his full authority on McClellan,—broke away because a sudden prescience of tragedy touched him on the quick. He was gone not more than five minutes. Stanton was sitting by the fire when the President returned. He looked up indignantly, but rose when he observed the expression in Lincoln's eyes.

"My dear Mr. President!" he exclaimed. "Bad news? The boys?"

Lincoln put a great hand against the mantel to support himself. He could see Stanton's bearded face only through a reeling black mist. After a moment he forced himself to say:

"Dr. Stone says there's no hope for Willie. The end may come any moment. I reckon you'll have to excuse me, Stanton!"

"Excuse you! Good God, Lincoln, haven't I buried my own precious child? Don't bother about anything. I'll go out and boot McClellan clear to Richmond. Don't bother!" He gave Lincoln a sudden bear hug, and rushed from the room.

The dreadful minutes marched on. Willie never wakened from his stupor, after rousing feebly toward dusk to ask Miss Ford to hold him. She lifted his head against her shoulder. An hour later he died lying so, with his father's face buried against his feet, with his mother walking the floor, groaning and twisting her hands.

Lizzie Keckley, when the Virginian, with infinite tenderness, had laid her burden down, touched Lincoln on the shoulder.

"Mr. Lincoln, if you will get the Madam into her room, I'll wash him and lay him out."

Lincoln staggered to his feet and going over to Mary, lifted her in his arms and carried her to her room, where he undressed her, and put her to bed. Her self-control was utterly shattered.

Willie's death was, it seemed to Lincoln, the greatest grief of his life. Even the death of Anne Rutledge, that most poignant loss of his youth, had not torn at his very vitals as did this. A ghastly hopelessness, the like of which he never before had felt, day by day increased within him.

Those about him believed that he was bearing up well, far better than poor Mary. Only the President himself knew the deeps that had been probed by Willie's too early withdrawal.

Miss Ford, giving all her time to the convalescent Tad, had perhaps clearer insight than any one, now that Mary's usually alert powers of observation were blunted by grief, into the inroads the tragedy was making on the President's calm common sense.

A week after the death, John Hay tapped on Mrs. Lincoln's door. It was about ten o'clock in the morning. He asked Lizzie Keckley, who answered, if the President were within.

"He must be in his own room," she hazarded. "He locked the door of his room early this morning."

John turned away, and went to Tad's room, where Miss Ford was sitting with her embroidery.

"I guess the Tycoon is locked in his bed chamber," he said. "Ought we to do anything? Do you think he's ill?"

"He's ill," replied the Virginian, "but not in the common parlance. He's keeping vigil, I would suppose. This is Thursday, just a week after Willie's going."

"Poor old fellow!" murmured John. "We must leave him alone, I suppose. But he's badly needed in the office."

All that day, Lincoln sat in his room in a lethargy of despair from which he made no attempt to rouse himself. For hours he thought of the boy, summoned every detail he could recall of the child's picturesque mind, dwelt in exquisite agony on his extraordinary promise,—for he was the cleverest one of the Lincolns' trio,—read again and again the poem to Colonel Baker, and wept because the little hand would write no more. Never again. Gone. Gone forever. But whither? Into nothingness? Lincoln groaned and rocked his long body in anguish.

There was the crux of it. His faith in God was impregnable. In immortality he had little faith. Willie gone, forever, into oblivion! And all those other sons of other fathers that he was sending, had sent, to join Willie,—was the grief of other fathers like his? If so, what was he not answerable for to the Maker of all? Aye, let this Thursday and all his Thursdays be spent on his knees in penance and despair.

He went without food that day, but slept at night, and the next morning appeared in his office, haggard, but calm.

No one questioned him. The struggle to move McClellan, to give vitality to the work for Compensated Abolishment, with the myriad lesser problems that accumulated more thickly every hour, appeared to absorb him utterly. But, on the second Thursday after Willie's death, again Lincoln locked himself in his room, and gave himself over to grief and dreadful hopelessness.

Mary was now recovered from her prostration. She made several attempts to enter her husband's room, but he did not answer when she called him, and, with a little sob of pity and anxiety, she gave over her efforts.

There was perhaps an intellectual as well as an emotional relief in this vigil of Lincoln's, though he was unconscious of either. But his instincts were always basically sane. No man of his powerful affections and emotion could endure fighting them perpetually. Quite unconsciously to him, the idea that if he gave no thought to Willie, to the dead that Grant was strewing in his path in the West,—if he gave no bitter pangs to them to-day, Thursday he could abandon himself to agonizing over them,—it was this idea that made it possible for Lincoln to work, in the days after his little son's death.

On this, his second Thursday of fasting, and prayer, and tears, he found his mind going back frequently to the arguments he had used to himself when he had forced McDowell to undertake the movement that ended in the disaster of Bull Run. He recalled how he had told himself that only blood and tears could unite the North into the demand that emancipation requite the unthinkable sacrifices of the war.

Unthinkable. Much as he had suffered in coming to that decision, it had required Willie's death to make him understand fully what that sacrifice must be. Had God had that purpose in taking the boy from him? Did God wish the war to stop? Had McClellan the truer vision? Was his procrastination an instrument of the Almighty?

A great wave of doubt, more painful than hopelessness, engulfed him. Was McClellan's way God's way? Was McClellan clean of political aspirations? Had he no dreams of being dictator, placed in the White House by the demands of the impatient North, which was growing to believe McClellan's constant assertion that the interference of the Administration held him back? Or, if the answer to this was "no," was Chase correct when he declared that McClellan dreamed of being a Democratic President, elected by Union Democrats, North and South, a soldier President, who had saved the Union, without interfering with slavery?

He groaned deeply, stopped his floor walking to rest his arm on the mantel, his head on his arm.

If McClellan could save the Union, shorn of slavery, if God would give him a sign that such was McClellan's ability, how gladly would he step aside and give McClellan his place!

If God would give him a sign!

Was Willie's death that sign? Did the Almighty wish to show him that what he was forcing on the people was not to be borne? . . . But it was to be borne. People had endured the sacrifice of war ever since history began, and never before with such an opportunity for compensation as lay in the destruction of slavery.

Here memory of Mary's often reiterated comment on his softness, where his affections were concerned, impinged on his brooding. He straightened himself. No one was more conscious than Lincoln of the weaknesses of his character. And now, with a sudden sweat of fear, he asked himself if this weakness was beginning to twist his whole attitude toward the war,—if Willie's death was making him maudlin toward McClellan.

He brought his fist down on the mantel. By the Eternals, this must not be so! He would hunt down McClellan's motives, and act on them without bowels of compassion. It was intolerable that anything connected with Willie should smack of the ignoble. . . . His son! His little son!

He fell to his knees beside the bed, and began once more to fight his way through the morass of loss that engulfed him.

The next morning he came into Mary's room as she was dressing, himself fully dressed, ghastly with weariness and suffering. She ran to him and threw her arms around his neck, looking up into his face with blue eyes,—Willie's eyes, full of love and sympathy.

"Abra'm, *must* you do it? Can't I help you? It would break Willie's heart to see you."

Lincoln's face twisted convulsively, but he replied in a voice of quiet determination, "No one can help me. I shall keep Thursday sacred to Willie, and all the other war dead, as long as I live."

Mary gasped, slowly unclasped her arms and returned to her bureau. She knew better than to attempt to argue or beguile him from this mood. "I'll be ready to go down to breakfast with you in a moment," she said in a practical voice.

That afternoon, an old friend called on Mary Lincoln, the Reverend Francis Vinton of Trinity Church, New York. To his surprise, Mary scarcely gave him time to express his sympathy for her loss, before taking him by the arm, she exclaimed:

"You are a godsend! I want you to talk to my husband. You must do something for him or he will go mad." She told him of the tragic Thursdays.

"But will the President permit me to admonish him?" asked Dr. Vinton. "After all, he is the Chief Executive!"

"He's showing himself the Chief Fanatic, just now," cried Mary. "You must save him for his task, Doctor."

A little connivance with the three secretaries made it possible for the clergyman, somewhat late in the afternoon, to find the President alone in his office. He greeted Vinton without interest, then waited courteously for him to state his errand.

"I have come," said the clergyman, "to protest against your indulging yourself in grief so freely that you are unfitting yourself for your responsibilities. It is not an example of Christian fortitude that you are showing the people, Mr. President."

Lincoln looked at Vinton with lack-luster eyes, wondering dully who would come in to scold him next. In the last two hours, Stanton, Chase, Sumner, and the entire Congressional Committee on the Conduct of the War, had berated him in succession for his mismanagement of various affairs. Suddenly a phrase of Vinton's roused him.

"God is not God of the dead. Your son is alive and with Him."

"Alive!" ejaculated Lincoln. "You believe that?"

"I *know* it, dear Mr. President!" The clergyman's voice shook a little at the simplicity and pain in the question.

"Alive! Alive!" Lincoln buried his face in his hands. Then he looked at the clergyman. "If I could believe that I'd see Willie again, it would give me strength to move mountains! I reckon," with a broken, twisted smile that was partly a contortion of pain, "I reckon it would give me strength to move McClellan."

Vinton was possessed of the greatest gift of the clergyman. He was convincing. He now fixed Lincoln's gaze with his own, and said in a voice such as Lincoln thought Christ might have used when he bade the troubled waters be still:

"You must believe that Willie lives. I believe it."

"And you are a man of as good intelligence as my own," murmured the President. "Why should my mind refuse the faith?"

"Because you shut yourself away with grief for your companion, not trust and hope. Willie, himself, is troubled by your un-wisdom, as your wife's dream shows."

"What dream?" demanded Lincoln. "Mary has a kind of second sight!"

"There, you see, dear Mr. President! I told you you were shutting yourself away from hope. You would not permit Mrs. Lincoln to talk to you, freely. She dared not tell you this. Last night, she dreamed that she heard Willie laughing. It was so real that it woke her, she thought, and she sat up in bed, to see Willie reading in the fire glow. She asked him why he laughed. 'It was a pleasant way to waken you, without frightening you,' he replied. 'I want to tell you that I'm having a heap of fun.' . . . And that was all. The next thing she knew it was daylight."

"A dream?" Lincoln smiled wistfully and murmured. "We are such stuff as dreams are made of . . . I seem to be troubling you all a good deal, Doctor. . . . You give me a curious comfort—you—and Mary's dream—"

"You lessen the religious faith of thousands of people when you show yourself so rebellious to the decrees of God," said Vinton.

Lincoln shook his head. "You deceive yourself, Doctor. No one has less influence than I. I wield authority, not influence."

The clergyman smiled. "Coming down from New York, two colored men standing near me,—the train was packed,—were discussing you, Mr. President. I was astounded by their sagacity and understanding. I'll not try to repeat all they said, but I'll tell you how they ended. One said, 'You hear about Massa Lincum all de time. He's on ebery nigger's lips, day and night. He walks de earth like de Lord.' And his friend said, 'God has hewed him out ob rock so's he can stand all de trouble of all de people.'"

With a great sigh, as he made the renunciation, Lincoln rose and held out his hand to Dr. Vinton. "There shall be no more mourning Thursdays, Doctor. If I cannot walk the earth like the Lord, I can walk it like a man, I reckon. Thank you, sir."

And he turned to greet a committee of Chicago business men, whom George Nicolay was ushering in.

CHAPTER XIX

"ALL QUIET ALONG THE POTOMAC"

TWO results accruing from Willie's death stood out among many. One was that Lincoln decided that he could not send away, for a time at least, the woman in whose arms his son had died.

The other was that, out of the soul searchings of his dedicated Thursdays, came a hardening of his attitude toward McClellan. On the 8th of March word came that the Confederates, concentrated at Manassas under Johnston, had retreated safely thirty miles to the south, thus denying the Army of the Potomac as cheap a victory as any general could desire. It was after this that Lincoln wrote McClellan, removing him from his position as General-in-Chief of all the Northern forces, leaving him, however, still at the head of the Army of the Potomac.

He ordered General Pope, who had been winning victories in the campaign to clear the Mississippi, to come East and take over the command of three army corps which Lincoln had named The Army of Virginia. He also gave McClellan peremptory orders to divide his army into four corps, and to leave one corps for the proper protection of Washington during the campaign which McClellan now proposed to begin against Richmond.

McClellan's written reply to Lincoln was courteous and manly. But in the call he made on the President later, he was bitter and insolent. Lincoln was sitting at his desk with a supper tray lying on his war maps, and with Mary hovering anxiously near by. She was looking delicate and worn in her deep mourning.

The General made her a sweeping bow, then throwing back his military cloak, he tossed his gauntlets and cap beside the tray, and said in a voice trembling with emotion:

"So you fear me, Mr. Lincoln, to that extent?"

The President returned his look coldly, and took an audible mouthful of soup. "Yes, I fear you, George."

"Only my patriotism keeps me from resigning from the army," cried McClellan.

"I know that," replied Lincoln, taking up a fresh spoonful of soup. "You've got plenty of patriotism, George. What you lack is the kind of gumption Grant seems to have."

"Why not give Grant my place?" sneered McClellan.

"He's doing well where he is," answered Lincoln. "I must have at least 50,000 men to guard Washington, McClellan, and you must clear the rebels out of the river before you take the rest of the Army south. I reckon it's not sense to have enemy batteries between you and me."

"I must save the Union!" exclaimed McClellan, "but I must allow myself to be directed by imbeciles! I know your game, Lincoln! You don't want to save the Union, that's why you seek to destroy me."

Mary uttered an angry exclamation, clapped her hand over her mouth and fled from the room. For a long moment, there was silence. Lincoln pushed his tray aside, clasped his knee and stared at the fire, while he sought for words in which to reach the young General.

"My suspicion is this, George. Jeff Davis knows that you are susceptible to flattery. He knows you are politically ambitious. He knows that you are a Democrat, willing to let slavery alone, if only you can save the Union. There's a pretty well-organized gang in this neighborhood seeing to it that you're kept in the frame of mind that you're in now. In fact, that Miss Ford, who's been living with us going on ten months, is an active member of the gang, I suspect."

McClellan stared, incredulity and anger struggling for supremacy in his face. "You needn't drag a woman into this insult."

"She wouldn't consider it an insult," returned Lincoln, coolly.

"I shall tell her your opinion of her!" cried the general. "If such are your suspicions, what right have you to have her here?"

"I have no right," replied Lincoln, catching his breath as the picture he never was to forget flashed before him, of the dying boy in the Virginian's enfolding arms. . . . He gave McClellan a clear glance. "Shall we have her in and talk it over?"

"By all means!" exclaimed the general. "It will give me exquisite pleasure to see this friend of my boyhood accused of treason!"

Lincoln rang the bell and gave James his order. Neither man spoke during the interval before Miss Ford came in. When the froufrou of her skirts announced her approach, Lincoln rose and took his place near the mantel.

She was in full evening dress; a pale green moiré antique with a train two yards long, of green velvet. It was cut so low that no mere man could imagine what kept the bodice in place. The great hoop, the train, the fan of enormous ostrich plumes, the mass of curls in her neck, her unusual height,—she was as impressive, thought the President, as the drum major of a crack regiment.

McClellan bowed over her hand. "Lady Ford, you look fit to devastate hearts, to-night! Even more fit than usual!"

She smiled. "Mr. Russell is taking me to the theater—quite an innocuous evening, I assure you, George."

"Sister Ford," said Lincoln, "the gentleman accuses me of insulting you when I tell him of certain suspicions of mine." He repeated his words of the earlier moment and paused.

The Virginian looked from one man to the other, smiling serenely. "But, George, that's not an insult! Of course, I've done everything I can to bolster up your self-confidence, and, of course, I've done all I can to make Greeley, Raymond, et al., tell the idiotic public that they must support the one military genius the war has so far produced. Is that treasonable?"

McClellan gave the President a triumphant glance. Lincoln's first impulse was to tell all that Mary had repeated to him. His natural caution intervened. But, still, the meeting had performed its purpose. He was convinced that McClellan was entirely unconscious of being regarded as a pawn by whatever clique the Virginian represented.

"The President," exclaimed McClellan, "has accused me, as you know, of possessing a secret,—some secret that keeps me from following his,—pardon me,—his absurd plans for taking Richmond. He wishes me to make a direct attack from Washington. I wish to attack from the lower Chesapeake. Therefore I have a treasonable secret." He shrugged his broad shoulders, then added with a quick change from the sardonic to the condemnatory, "He has not yet replied to my accusation that he does not want to save the Union."

"Give me details, George," urged Lincoln. "How have I given you that impression?"

"By doing all that you can to hamper and ignore the one soldier in the country capable of saving the Union," replied the general promptly.

"No, no, George! You're stupid in that!" protested Miss Ford. "Mr. Lincoln is trying his utmost in his own way to support you. What I accuse him of,—since this seems to be a sort of Truth game,—I accuse him of giving far more attention to his hope of freeing the slaves than he does to putting down the Rebellion. The Union doesn't come first with him."

"By jings," exclaimed the President, "in the game of tag, you're the next 'it,' Sister Ford! *You*'re stupid, now. If the so-called Confederacy is successful, of what avail for me to talk of freeing slaves? The Union *must be saved!* That is the very foundation of every move I make. But"—he paused, then went on with an earnestness that caused both his hearers to change color—"but—the more this war is *prolonged,* the more emancipation will press on me as a military necessity. If time goes on with no marked successful action by our armies, I shall be obliged to cripple the military superiority of the South by freeing the slaves in the rebellious States. If this war is *prolonged,* England and France will find a pretext for interfering, to aid the South. This pretext will be based on the hypocrisy of our Federal Government in countenancing slavery, while attempting to put down a slave-holder's rebellion. Public opinion in England is all for the South. An emancipation proclamation would leave Europe not a leg to stand to justify intervention. Do I make myself clear?"

"Yes!" cried McClellan. "Knowing that I have no desire to interfere with the institution of slavery, you hold emancipation over me as a club to drive me into a campaign with an enemy of double my numbers."

Lincoln groaned, and ran his fingers through his hair till it stood on end. Then he walked back to his desk and began to eat his frugal supper. McClellan bowed to Miss Ford and strode from the room. The Virginian warmed her long fingers thoughtfully at the grate, the fire glow turning her pearls to rubies. Mary, who had observed McClellan's flight, came in through the private door. She gave Miss Ford a not altogether admiring glance.

"Mr. Russell is in the sitting room, Miss Ford," she said.

"Thank you," replied the Virginian, continuing to warm her hands.

"Abra'm, let me send for some warm food for you! You haven't eaten enough to-day to nourish a sparrow." Mary put a pleading hand on her husband's shoulder.

Lincoln shook his head and continued his attack on cold potatoes and gravy. His common sense was urging him to send the Virginian away, now. His intuition was insisting that he hold her at the White House,—his intuition and his love for Willie.

"I would like very much," drawled Miss Ford, "to visit my sister in Baltimore for a week or so. I am a little tired."

Mary's hard glance instantly softened. "You poor soul! You must be, after all these weeks of nursing. Only don't tell Taddie! He'll make such a fuss!"

"No, I'll slip away to-morrow—if Mrs. Lincoln could let me have my month's stipend a little in advance?" raising her eyes with an air of embarrassment that became her well.

"Of course! Whenever you wish it." It embarrassed Mary, in turn, to think of wages in connection with this gorgeous creature.

"Thank you, dear Mrs. Lincoln. I'll go to that blessed Englishman then. He'll be purple with impatience!" and she made a splendid, undulating exit.

Mary turned to the President with a wistful twinkle. "She keeps me in my place just by the way she wears her crinoline!"

"Jinny and Mrs. Keckley will keep us informed about this new move, won't they?" asked Lincoln.

"Yes," replied Mary. "Abra'm, I really am afraid of her. There's something of the tiger in her."

"So am I afraid of her, but only through what she may be able to do to McClellan. . . . What a pity! What a pity! . . . Well, maybe he really intends to move, now!"

"Abra'm, who will be the new General-in-Chief?" asked Mary.

"By jings, the next fellow that gets that job'll earn it by having some real battles behind him!" cried the President. "Ah, Charles," as Senator Sumner came in, "prompt as usual! I wanted to hear of the day's work at your factory up yonder on Compensated Abolishment."

Sumner was holding both Mary's hands in his. He looked her over, shaking his head, then still holding her hands, he turned to Lincoln. "This dear person needs a change. Send her to New York for a little while."

"No! no!" cried Mary, quick tears springing to her eyes at the touch of sympathy. "I can't leave Mr. Lincoln or Taddie. I'm fatuous enough to believe that neither can do without me."

Lincoln nodded at the tray. "I'm one of her children, you know, Charles."

"Yes, I understand. You are a fortunate man, Mr. President," Sumner's delightful smile gleamed as he bowed to Mary.

"And you are a good friend," declared Mary, picking up the tray and walking out.

Miss Ford, of course, stayed only a few days in Baltimore. She then made a cross-country trip to the Ford plantation, a few miles north of Fairfax Court House. Appropriately enough, she reached there late at night in a driving rainstorm. She and Jinny, wrapped in a tarpaulin on the rear seat of the carryall, were wet and cold, when the mud-plastered horse brought up before the portico, the pillars of which were fitfully revealed by a lantern in the hands of old Uncle Bob, who was the only house servant remaining to the Fords.

"Fire in de den, Miss Lady," said the old man, leading the way into the house. "Only jes' enough cheers and sich for dat room left in de whole place. Seems like ebery time Massa Lincum needs a cheer or a table he sent here for it." Something like a chuckle escaped him.

"You dare to laugh, you fool nigger?" exclaimed the Virginian, furiously. "What do you mean by it?" slashing her wet gauntlets across the back of the negro's neck.

He rubbed his neck philosophically. "Like ol' times!" he grunted. "Massa Taylor, he waitin' fo' yo', Miss Lady," pushing open a door.

A small, square room, lined with books and hunting prints. A huge center table, littered with spurs, riding whips, wine glasses. A white marble fireplace—two caryatids supporting the mantel—and Captain Taylor in the uniform of a Federal gunner drying his wet back before the flames. The two greeted each other quietly, as if each was oppressed by responsibility. Jinny took off her mistress's wet green cloak, then went out, closing the door behind her.

Miss Ford sank into the chair Taylor placed for her. "How much time have you, Tom?"

"I dare not risk staying here a moment after you and I have exchanged views. . . . What's Lincoln's state of mind?"

"I can best report that to you by telling you of my conversation with him the day before I left." She repeated the interview with herself and McClellan.

Taylor listened with intense interest. When she had finished he said, abruptly, "That ought to persuade Jeff Davis, finally, that Lincoln is no fool. What's the status of Compensated Abolishment?"

"Sumner in the Senate and Arnold in the House will try to force that through as a recommendation, and Lincoln's going to get through his ancient bill, twenty years or so old, that he tried to get passed when he was a Congressman for freeing the niggers in the District of Columbia. He's arranging to have public schools for nigger brats, in Washington."

"Nothing like fanning the flames to keep the rebellion hot," commented Taylor.

"Compensated Abolishment will never pass with the border States. That's not what worries me," Miss Ford declared. "What I fear is that they will refuse too quickly. As long as we can keep Lincoln hoping for that, he'll let immediate emancipation alone."

"The border States are hard to manage," Taylor shook his head. "The presence of the Yankee troops in them is making the niggers awful impudent and uneasy, and intimidating our loyalists. But we'll do what we can. What's your feeling about McClellan?"

"He'll have to begin his march on Richmond or the country will force Lincoln to remove him. You know his plans, don't you?"

The captain nodded. "Our military spies really are good, you know. What a fool he was not to have taken Lincoln's plan, before Johnston got away from Manassas! . . . Quick action! How can we get quick action with McClellan?"

"By making him believe his patriotic duty is to lead the Army of the Potomac against Washington, and make himself dictator before he starts for Richmond. That done, the next move must come from the Southern Unionists. They must offer to make peace and return to the Union, provided the sanction of slavery is written into the Constitution. Can that be done?"

"I think General Lee would favor it," replied Taylor, carefully. "That dictator idea might work both ways. Lee and McClellan at the head of the armies could control the whole situation, if they were determined to do so."

The two stared at each other, faces pale with the magnitude of the suggestion. After a short silence, Taylor said:

"You're right. We must work rapidly. If worst comes to worst, we'll have to get rid of Sumner, Arnold, even Lincoln—a stray bullet, you know."

"No! Never!" breathed the Virginian, clutching at her heart. "Never assassination, Tom!"

"Names of things don't weigh, in war," said the captain, quietly. "What difference does it make whether a sharp-shooter works on the field and kills a general, or in the city and kills the Commander-in-Chief? When I entered this work I cast behind me all my old ideas of decency and fair play as I've told you. There's no such thing in war,—and I used to pride myself on my delicate sense of honor! As far as that's concerned, you used to be the only woman I ever knew who could be trusted."

A twist of pain contracted Miss Ford's fine lips. "I know, Tom! But not assassination!"

The officer pulled at his mustache and eyed her keenly. "In love with Lincoln, Lady?"

She lifted her head haughtily, caught the keen, yet compassionate look in his blue eyes, hesitated and then with the calm dignity that hushed any comment on Taylor's lips, she said:

"I would cast the whole of my influence and interest in slavery into his lap, if he would give me one half the feeling I have for him."

"Does he know that?"

"Yes."

"And he is impregnable?"

"He is impregnable," said Miss Ford.

Taylor sighed deeply, tested a cigar, drying on the hearth, then laid his hand on the Virginian's knee:

"I'm sorry, Lady. It never occurred to me you were playing with fire and liable to be scorched.—You haven't been South for a year, so you can't understand the degree to which Lincoln is hated,—and Sumner too. If they keep on tampering with slavery, they'll both of them be shot.—Well, it's all a dirty business. I wish to God it was over. I'll report to President Davis within a week."

"Not with regard to Lee and the dictatorship, I should hope!" ejaculated Miss Ford.

"Hardly!" with a cynical laugh. "There are plenty of people dissatisfied with Davis, Lady. Plenty of people who would be glad to end the war and return to the Union, if only they can keep their niggers. My idea is that the thing should be done before summer, before Lincoln's Compensated Abolishment hopes peter out." He rose and began to draw on his sodden blue coat. "You'll hear from me by the usual route."

"Did Uncle Bob feed you, Tom?" reaching out to touch the wet skirts of his coat. "I hope you'll not take cold."

"The old fellow gave me his last plate of 'hog and hominy,' I'd say, from the look of it. No," as she moved to ring the bell, "I have had plenty. As for cold—" Captain Taylor suddenly put his hand under the Virginian's chin and lifted her face—"Lady, do you really care whether I die of cold or a bullet? Before the war, I thought I had a chance with you." His hawk-like face was very appealing.

Miss Ford's eyes filled with tears. "Sometimes I think you're the only real friend I have in the world, Tom."

He stooped and kissed her. "Well, that's something!" he said with a little smile, and gathered up his gloves and cap.

When he had gone, Miss Ford rang for Jinny and told her to serve supper. They had brought a hamper of food in the carryall.

"I'll sleep on the sofa here, before the fire," she added. "We'll start back for Baltimore at dawn."

A week later, the President, ringing for a clean towel, was a bit staggered when Jinny marched into his room. She was a pretty young mulatto, almost as tall as her mistress, but much more slender, with a round saucy face and intelligent brown eyes.

It was barely daylight. Lincoln had had a bad night and was rising early for a walk in the garden to clear his mind. He stood before the washstand in trousers and undershirt, splashing water on his face as Jinny appeared.

"You're the only one up, eh, Jinny?" he asked.

"No, sir, I made James give me the job. Massa Lincum, I ain't goin' to trus' this to no Lizzie Keckley. I'm telling you my own self. I heard ebery word with my own ear at Miss Lady's keyhole." Flourishing one of the towels, she repeated, almost verbatim, the conversation between Miss Ford and Captain Taylor.

The President toweled himself vigorously and brushed his hair while listening to the recital. When she had finished he said:

"Jinny, have you repeated this to any one else?"

"Not a libin' soul, Massa Lincum."

"That's fine. Promise me that you won't repeat it, either!" reaching for his clean shirt.

"I promise, Massa Lincum. You going to scald an' roast 'em, ain't you, sir?"

"God's going to do that, Jinny. All you and I can do is to worry along, day by day. You are a good friend, Jinny. I'm obliged to you."

The door flew open and James appeared. "What you doing here, Jinny? That was my bell!"

"Which bell? The one that rang yesterday?" demanded Jinny. "Come out of here, nigger! Don't you suppose Massa Lincum wants his privacy?"

Lincoln smiled as the door closed abruptly. Smiled and then sighed. How could he work faster and still faster to best the malignancy that Jinny once more brought home to him. And, after all, he had been right in keeping Miss Ford. What simpler way was there for him to keep himself informed regarding McClellan?

CHAPTER XX

HARRISON'S LANDING

LINCOLN entered his office, that morning after the interview with Jinny, fully determined to put Grant in McClellan's place. But, as if McClellan had sensed that he had stretched the President's patience to the limit, the first telegram that met his eyes as he stood over his desk was one from McClellan. He informed Lincoln that that morning the first regiments were embarking on the vessels which were to carry the army down the Chesapeake to Fortress Monroe from which the march on Richmond was to begin.

Lincoln read it and burst into a cheer as he rushed into the secretaries' office to share his relief. He found William Russell there, and brought him back to his office to show him a sample of gunpowder.

"Get your knapsack packed, my boy!" exclaimed Lincoln, as he led the Englishman into the room. "You'll be in Richmond in a month."

Russell shook his head. "Mr. Secretary Stanton will not give me a pass. He too, calls me 'Bull Run Russell.' "

"Shucks! That's too bad," declared Lincoln. "Don't you worry, boy. I'll send you along, William, with a pass that'll carry you plumb to Richmond! Look here! Look at the sample of powder some one's trying to sell Uncle Sam. Any backwoodsman is a judge of powder. I'll wager a first-class carpetbag against that valise you're carrying, William, that there's too much ash left by this stuff."

Lincoln walked over to the grate, sprinkled some of the powder on the hearth and applied the hot poker to it. When the smoke had cleared away he pointed to the ridge of gray ash with an air of mingled triumph and despondency.

"I told you so! I wonder who is honest!"

Russell stood beside the window, silently looking out on the distant river. Lincoln dusted off his hands, removed his spectacles and slowly crossed the room to join him in gazing at the far, magic view.

"Your offer is generous, sir," said the correspondent, finally, "but I've decided to give up and go home. This is a farewell visit to you. There is no getting news for a reporter who is forced down the throats of army headquarters. Not only am I 'Bull Run' Russell, but I am British, and, so, abhorrent to the American people. I cannot recall ever having received such treatment in a civilized, or, for that matter, a barbarous country, in any of my somewhat extensive travels."

"I reckon we lead the world here in America in not being able to see beyond our noses, William," agreed the President, thinking sadly of Willie's exclamation after the funeral of Colonel Baker. "I was ashamed of America, Papa day." Then he added aloud, "I reckon, too, that the curse, as well as the privilege, of a democracy is self-conceit. Class distinctions keep that down a little, in Europe, I should suppose."

Russell, obviously in no mood for philosophy, smiled ruefully and nodded.

"I'm sorry to have you go, William, and I'm glad too," said Lincoln, "because I've got an errand for you." He turned from the window and paced the length of the room and back, stopping to look long and sadly from the window, his tired eyes deep sunk in his head, lines about his mouth that had not been there six months before. "I want you to take a message for me to Queen Victoria."

"I?" ejaculated Russell.

"Yes, you, because you're British and because you know me and I know you. I want you to talk to the Queen; just sit down and have a good long evening with her. She's full of horse-sense, I believe. You tell her what I'm trying to do and ask her to call off her dogs till I can do it. Tell her her folks are worrying me more than my own, which is saying a good deal. Ask her to play fair and keep out of it. She's a nice sensible woman, and once she learns what my ideas and troubles are, I believe she'll sympathize. Ask her to do this, Russell, in the name of common humanity."

He paused, surveying the war correspondent eagerly and anxiously. He admired Russell. From the very first he had seen him as a distinguished person, whose exceptional qualities were quite lost on the American public.

Russell returned his look, clearly. "You ask me to do that, sir, knowing that I must be bitter against Americans?"

"I don't blame you for being bitter," Lincoln jerked his head in agreement. "Tell her about that too. But what I know is that you're not bitter against the thing this Administration is trying to do—that's the important point. Can't you meet up with the Queen?"

"Yes, Mr. Lincoln, I can arrange that. Look here, sir!" with a little smile. "I'll drive a bargain with you. If I undertake to deliver your message, will you agree to this: When the next crisis arises between this country and England, will you see Lord Lyons, yourself, and give him an opportunity to learn your views, first hand?"

"I'll do that," declared Lincoln.

"The bargain is completed!" Russell held his hand. "Almost, sir, you have reconciled me to going home."

The President held Russell's hand, while he said with the smile that made his face beautiful, "When this war is over, my wife and I are going to pawn the court jewels and take a trip around the world. And we'll look to find you."

"I'll go with you, as your courier, sir!" exclaimed Russell. "God bless you and your great cause, Mr. Lincoln."

"Thank you, William. In the long run, I reckon He's the only one who can bless the cause!"

Russell picked up his dispatch case and went out to say good-by to his other friends in the household.

From that day on, for months, every event in the United States was secondary in Lincoln's mind to what was happening to McClellan and his army. Through the War Office where he spent many hours out of every twenty-four, he watched the progress of that great campaign, on the Peninsula, with breathless, soul-wearing concern. But as day succeeded day, he worked no closer to an understanding of the young General-in-Chief than had Stanton, who in a single day had run the gamut from pronouncing McClellan the greatest strategist that ever lived, to sending him as a criminal fool to perdition.

McClellan, in Lincoln's words, fooled April away in gingerly approaching by siege methods Rebel fortification that could have been taken by assault. But during May, he worked his way to within four miles of Richmond. The North was a tip-toe with hope and enthusiasm. McClellan was a young military god—he was great as Napoleon was great. And then, within sight of his goal, McClellan paused, dallied, called for reënforcements!

His entire campaign on the Peninsula, indeed, was marked by continuous shrill cries for more men. Lincoln and Stanton, walking the floor, in the War Office, strained the resources of the country to the utmost to send him all he demanded. But when, at last, he demanded a hundred thousand reënforcements, Stanton balked.

"If we had a million men, he'd swear the enemy had two millions and then he would sit down in the mud and yell for three. The fool has given the Rebels what they needed, time, and he'll be retreating next, see if he's not."

"Oh, I can't believe that!" protested Lincoln. "Why he's almost on top of Richmond now."

"He'll never get his nerve up to assault the town," growled Stanton.

"Do you mean to tell me that after all this superb fighting by our men, McClellan's not enough of a military man to seize his victory? Come, Stanton, you're not fair to McClellan."

"You'll see!" retorted Stanton, with an oath.

And Lincoln did see. On the last day of June, McClellan sent a dispatch stating that after terrible fighting and losses, he had ordered his army to retreat. His telegram was couched in terms showing such a state of mental panic on the part of the writer, that after his first reaction of anger and dismay, Lincoln decided to ignore the mutinous insolence of its manner.

"Save the army at all events," he replied. "I feel any misfortune to you or the army as keenly as you feel it, yourself."

McClellan's answer to this was a dispatch, a very lengthy one, incoherent and threatening in its tone, from which the startled President deduced that the Army of the Potomac virtually had been wiped out.

"Save what you can of men and supplies, even if you have to retire to Washington," he wired.

Two hours later, Stanton rushed into Lincoln's office with the reply, addressed to the Secretary of War.

"Read this! Read this!" he shouted.

Lincoln read, wincing as he did so, a virulent attack on himself and Stanton for their criminal neglect of the Army of the Potomac, which ended with this astounding accusation!

"If I save this army now, I tell you plainly that I owe no thanks to you or any other person in Washington. You have done your best to sacrifice this army."

Stanton danced about the room, cursing bitterly. "Hold on, Stanton," protested the President. "No use acting like an old horse with a gadfly on his rump. Let's figure this thing out with our heads, not our heels.

"McClellan started on this trip 120,000 strong. We've sent him 40,000 more. What does he do with his soldiers? Are they lost on the way, like a fellow carrying fleas across the barn floor with a shovel?"

Stanton, as he listened to the President's homely phrasing, began to cool down. "It's his cowardly hallucination as to the numbers of the enemy, the damn fool. The Rebels' Peninsula forces all told aren't over 50,000 men. Their losses have been as great as ours which don't total 20,000. I tell you the man is either crooked or a coward."

"If it were not for these good fellows out West and around New Orleans, gnawing at the Rebels' vitals, I'd feel as if the bottom was out of everything," declared Lincoln. "But with folks like Halleck, Hunter, Burnside, Grant, and Farragut upholding each other's fists, I can't quite despair. Reckon I'd better go down to Harrison's Landing and have a talk with McClellan, and see if I can sift out the facts. Will you come with me?"

Stanton shook his head. "Guess I'd better not. Our baby is sick and I must be ready to go into the country to see him, whenever Mrs. Stanton sends for me—to see him die."

"Is it that bad? Stanton, go to your wife now! I'll take your place."

Again the Secretary of War shook his head. The two men gave each other a look of sympathy and understanding, then Stanton said, "Even were I not held by domestic affliction, I'd doubt the wisdom of my going.

McClellan claims friendship to my face and applies vile and opprobrious epithets to me behind my back."

"Speaking of epithets," Lincoln's eyes twinkled, "did you hear of my repartee with Lovejoy, the man I sent to you, this morning?"

Stanton, scowling a little, looked at the President over his spectacles with doubt and some irritation in his eyes. "I have no time for repartee, myself," he grumbled.

"Might as well say you have no time to smile!" exclaimed Lincoln. "Lovejoy came back after I'd sent him to you and said that you read my message with the remark that Lincoln was a damn fool. I told him that if you said it was so, it must be so, for you were nearly always right."

Stanton's color rose immediately. "He should not have repeated words spoken in irritation. Your request was unreasonable, sir, and I was obliged to refuse you."

Lincoln pursed his lips speculatively. Stanton was one of the most able men he had ever met, but he was also the most irascible. He was as heady with power as Seward, but lacked Seward's charming sense of humor and his good nature. In spite of the fact that he knew that Stanton, before his induction into the Secretaryship, had tried to incite McClellan to turn dictator, in spite of the vile remarks Stanton had made about his personal appearance, Lincoln's enormous trust in the man's integrity and ability gave him a curious sort of liking for him. He was determined that Stanton should come into line, admit his leadership, and become his friend.

"Stanton," he said, "you fritter away an awful lot of energy on merely getting even. Personal grudges don't pay. Now you do as Lovejoy wants, forgetting that you hate him."

"No!" thundered Stanton.

"I reckon here's where the foot goes down." Lincoln did not lift his voice, but his face was suddenly stone. "You are to do as Lovejoy wishes, Stanton."

Silence. The July heat in the office almost overpowering, sweat running down the faces of both men. Lincoln holding his knee, patiently. Stanton tugging at his beard, then gathering up the papers—

"It shall be done as the Chief Executive commands," he said, hoarsely.

"That's right, Stanton," Lincoln nodded, casually, and turned to a map of Tennessee. "I have written to Halleck to come down here as General-in-Chief. His record would warrant it. Grant can take over the Department of the West."

"You have already written him, and without consulting me?" ejaculated Stanton.

"Without consulting any one," replied the President. "I've studied Halleck more than any of you. His only weakness is lack of decisiveness. Grant supplied that in the West. You'll supply it here. He'll be here the last of July, and we'll sic him onto McClellan. In the meantime, as I've said, I'll go down to Harrison's Landing, where this telegram is from. Hope he stays there long enough for me to catch him! Come to think of it, I needn't wait until to-morrow. I'll borrow John Hay, and we'll go down to-night."

And go he did, reaching McClellan's camp forty-eight hours after leaving Washington.

He made no effort to see McClellan alone, for he was utterly weary of arguing with the general. He hoped only to gather together enough facts to make a final sweeping war policy. He did not permit himself to use any portion of his mind, during his few hours at Harrison's Landing, on any other matter save what he was seeing and hearing.

He viewed the beautifully ordered camp, sweltering in the July moonlight. He slapped mosquitoes and listened to McClellan and his generals discuss the next move of the Army of the Potomac. He issued no orders, though he expressed anxiety as to the health of the soldiers, carrying on a summer campaign in the wretched climate of the Peninsula. The smell of the pines, of the hot, dew-wet sands, of leather accouterments, of horses, of ammunition, depressed him. It had the tang of death in it. The voice of the river sliding between its low banks gave him a vague feeling of homesickness. He had been bred in a land of rivers.

But he learned the facts which he had come to learn. However panic-stricken McClellan was, there was no panic among his officers and men. The majority of his generals believed they were in no danger from the enemy, and were not in favor of a retreat. He learned that the army that remained numbered about 90,000 men, with the astounding number of 40,000 absent with authority. He learned that supplies were adequate, the men as well cared for, as such an arduous campaign could permit.

At midnight he started back for Fortress Monroe and Washington. Just before stepping aboard the gunboat that was to convey him and John Hay down the James, McClellan handed Lincoln a letter. The President read it by the light of a lantern, thanked McClellan for it, casually, and put it in his pocket. Even its contents, he told himself, must not permit him to quarrel with McClellan.

Yet it was as outrageous a document ever soldier penned to his superior officer.

It presumed to instruct the President as to his duties and power, and warned him against any forcible interference with slavery, declaring that any such attempt on Lincoln's part would rapidly disintegrate the Federal armies.

Its phrases rankled, and after they had left Fortress Monroe and were on the transport for Washington, Lincoln gave the note to John Hay to read. The young man held it close to a ship's lantern and devoured the contents with much muttering and snorting.

"You'll *have* to court-martial him for that!" he declared, hoarse with indignation when he had finished.

"I don't know what I'm going to do," replied Lincoln. "That letter don't amount to so much in itself, except as showing up his dreams. He'd like to have my job, winning back the South by promises about protecting slavery. I suppose I must consider that particular dream, when I make my decisions about what to do with him but it won't influence me greatly. I've got to think of him in his relation to his army, and the war, not to me."

He leaned back in the chair which had been placed for him in the prow of the little vessel, and struggled to clear his mind of all the countless problems that rendered a complete concentration on McClellan nearly impossible. He found this so difficult that finally he had recourse to an old remedy. He turned to poetry.

It was nearing dawn. Dim shore lines and soft salt air were soothing to sight and sense.

"Do you know Browning, John?" asked Lincoln. Then, without waiting for a reply, he repeated in a low monotone:

". . . The hills like giants at a hunting lay,
Chin upon hand, to see the game at bay,—
'Now stab and end the creature—to the heft!'
Not hear? When noise was everywhere! It tolled
Unceasing like a bell. Names in my ears,
Of all the lost adventurers, my peers . . .
There they stood, ranged along the hillside, met
To view the last of me, a living frame
For one more picture! In a sheet of flame
I saw them and I knew them all. And yet
Dauntless the slung horn to my lips I set,
And blew.—'*Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came.*' "

He rose as he finished and stood beside the rail, a giant, John thought, against the pallid sky. After a moment of thought, he went back to the opening lines of the tremendous poem and repeated the whole of it.

John Hay sat in awed silence.

After Lincoln had completed the last verse again, the two remained listening to the chug-chug of the paddle-wheel, the rush of wind and water for a long moment.

"But he hasn't the humanness of Shakespeare," said Lincoln. "Take King John, for example." He recited several long excerpts ending with Constance's immortal query,—

"And, father cardinal, I have heard you say
That we shall see and know our friends in Heaven.
If that be true, I shall see my boy again,"—

He caught his head in his hands and pressed it with a deep groan. "If that be true—aye—that's the rub!" Then he laid a gentle hand on young Hay's tired shoulder. "Come, John, let's see if these folks will give us breakfast."

CHAPTER XXI

CHILDE ROLAND TO THE DARK TOWER CAME

THEY reached the White House in the late afternoon. Lincoln asked the doorman, at once, for his wife. He felt a deep need to draw on Mary's affection.

"Well, Mr. President," said the old Irishman, deliberately, "she's having a little trouble with the general public, out by the south portico. You know you said the Wednesday afternoon concerts Mrs. Lincoln called off after Master Willie's death, could begin again. Mrs. Lincoln she's just went out and ordered the Marine Band to go home, and folks are pretty mad about it."

"Where's Taddie, Daniel?" asked Lincoln, wearily.

"Hea' I am, Papa day," shouted Tad, racing up in a linen suit well smeared with chocolate lollypop. "I've been watching fo' you all the time and then you get in without my noticing!"

Lincoln caught him up and kissed him several times. "Let's go find mother, Taddie darling. Where is she?"

"On the south po'tico. Guess she's awful mad. Let's go up stai's and see what you b'ought me. Did you b'ing me something, Papa day?"

"Yes, a rifle one of the soldiers gave me that was through the Seven Days' Battle. It's with my stuff." The President strode through the hall to the south portico.

The leader of the Marine Band was standing before Mary looking down at the little figure in black organdie with anger and embarrassment struggling in his face. Behind Mary were Miss Ford, Charles Sumner and pretty Kate Chase. On the lawns below was a concourse of people gathered in gesticulating groups.

Lincoln bowed to the three behind Mary and, placing his hand on his wife's arm, said:

"I want to borrow my wife for a moment, Scala. Wait here till we come back."

"But, Abra'm," cried Mary excitedly, "you must not—"

Lincoln led her away. "Hush!" he said in a voice so low only Mary and the band leader heard him, so fraught with command that Mary caught her breath as if choked.

He led her to the far end of the portico, moving slowly, for they were watched by a thousand eyes.

"Mary! Mary! Mary! Are you insane? Do you hope to force all the people of Washington to share your grief by antagonizing them?"

She looked up at him, her blue eyes blazing, but he gave her no opportunity to speak.

"What would Willie say if he knew that you were depriving people of music because of him?"

"It's not that!" cried Mary. "You ought to know me better than that. It's just that I can't bear to hear music since he left us. It kills my heart. And the Marine Band is the worst because its music is so exquisite."

"I know!" Quick tears softened Lincoln's eyes.— "But—Stanton's baby is dying. Will Mrs. Stanton make rows for Stanton to clear up, in the name of their dead boy?"

"Abra'm! Abra'm! My cursed tongue!" Mary freed her hand from her husband's and rushed back to the band leader. "Captain Scala, my husband shows me that I've not made myself clear. I'm not expecting others to mourn with me. I've been stupid and selfish. I've not wanted you to play your lovely music because it is so lovely that it makes my heart bleed again. I've been stupid and hysterical. Will you not forgive me and give the people the concert you planned?"

The anger left Scala's flushed face. "Why didn't you say that in the beginning, my dear Mrs. Lincoln?"

"Because I have the awful weakness of speaking with irritation first and thinking with regret afterward!" Mary smiled wistfully up into the band leader's eyes. "I've fought it all my life, but the stress of these days makes it very difficult for me."

She spoke with that endearing childishness so characteristic of her. The little group behind her smiled, sympathetically. Scala bowed over her small, soft hand.

"Takes a good deal of strength, I'd say, Madam President, to 'fess up like that. Thank you!" looking at her with new respect. "These folks have got to thank you, too."

He moved quickly to the edge of the portico and in a few simple words gave them Mary's reason for her unreasonable request. Mary and Lincoln slipped into the house as he began to speak, but the vigorous handclapping that followed Scala's statement reached them as they climbed the stairs and a few minutes later the notes of a waltz floated in at the windows of Mary's bedroom, whither Lincoln had led her.

"Will it be too much for you?" he asked, looking at her flushed cheeks.

"No!" she replied. "That particular foolishness is ended. Sit in that big chair, Abra'm, and let me fan you. We ought to go out to the Soldiers' Home tonight."

"A fan is my idea of nothingness!" ejaculated the President. "Just have Taddie here and let's have a *family* moment, if possible. I must get a little let up."

"And I bring you home to a scene!" Mary gave a heart-broken sigh as she pulled the bell rope.

Taddie flew in, grimy, round cheeks runneled with perspiration, a rifle as tall as himself in his arms. He rested it on the back of a chair, and pointed it at his mother.

"See what Papa day b'ought me!" he shouted.

Lincoln leaped from his place and took the gun. "Don't ever point at anybody, Tad!" he exclaimed with an apologetic glance at his wife, and wondering for the first time if this were the wisest gift for a boy.

Tad shrieked for the return of his gun. Mary sat on the ottoman, a little set smile on her lips.

Suddenly Lincoln laughed. "You're not going to complain, even if your son shoots you, eh, wife? Bless you! Reckon I've made a fool of myself, in my turn. Come here, Taddie darling."

It required some long negotiation but eventually Taddie was the recipient of a silver dollar, and the gun was removed by Louis.

"Now!" the President settled back in his chair, with Tad on his knee and Mary's hand in his, "now, for a little solid comfort! Tad, tell me all the bad things you did while I was away, and all the punishments mother gave you for them."

"She didn't know about most of 'em," retorted Tad. "I did the baddest one to Miss Fo'd and she neve' tells. Will you spank me, mamma, if I tell now?"

"Of course not, goosie," smiled his mother. "Do you think I'd spoil the one precious moment alone with your father in months?"

"Well, I took my goat to bed with me and—you know," looking up into his father's face with eyes of angelic innocence, "it's funny how goat smell makes some folks mad, isn't it? Miss Fo'd acted madda' about the smell than about the things he chewed up. Now I don't notice my goat smell at all. It—"

He paused to listen, half puzzled and half gratified, to his father's shout of laughter.

"Some one is at the do'," he said at last, watching his father mop the tears from his eyes. "So I can't tell you what he chewed."

"Run and open the door, Taddie," sighed his mother. The precious moment evidently was gone.

It was Louis, sent by John Hay to report that the committee of Congressmen from the border States was waiting for the President. Tad took advantage of the interruption to disappear with the silver dollar. As Louis closed the door, Lincoln turned to Mary, the laughter in his eyes replaced by burning sadness.

"I think they've come to make a final refusal of the offer of compensated abolishment."

Mary took one of her husband's hands in both of hers. "Abra'm, I hope they will refuse it! Charles Sumner has really made an Abolitionist of me."

"You guess, do you, what I shall do in case they refuse, and what it will cost?" asked Lincoln.

That look of second sight which he so held in awe came into Mary's fine eyes. "I guess and I know. You are predestined, Abra'm. Do what God tells you."

He stooped and kissed her on brow and lips. "You have given me new strength as I knew you would."

What he said, a few minutes later, to the group in his office, belongs to the history of the human struggle for freedom. He stood awkwardly beside the table, his black clothing rumpled and travel-stained, his eyes older than the pyramids.

". . . If you had voted for the resolution in the gradual emancipation message of last March, the war would now be substantially ended. Let the States that are in rebellion see definitely and certainly that in no event will the States you represent ever join their proposed confederacy, and they cannot much longer maintain the control. But you cannot divest them of the hope to ultimately have you with them so long as you show a determination to perpetuate the institution within your own States. . . . How much better for you and your people to take the step which at once shortens the war and secures substantial compensation for that which is sure to be wholly lost in any other event. . . . I pray you to consider this proposition. . . . As you would perpetuate the popular government for the best people in the world, I beseech you that you do in no wise omit this. Our common country is in great peril, demanding the loftiest views and boldest action to bring it speedy relief. Once relieved, its form of government is saved to the world—its happy future assured and rendered inconceivably grand. To you, more than to any other, the privilege is given to assure that happiness and swell that grandeur, and to link your own name therewith forever."

When he had finished his plea, which he gave with a wistful passion indicative of the depth both of his hope and his fear, he stepped into the secretaries' office, to permit the Congressmen to discuss what he had said. Both Hay and Nicolay were absent, and Lincoln was grateful for the moment of solitude. He seated himself on a shabby desk and fastened his eyes unseeingly on a vase of pink phlox—the room was heavy with their scent,—while he concentrated every faculty of his soul on the one hope, that the men whispering in his office would see the light.

Perhaps no one else in the world merely passing the open door could have roused him from his depths of absorption but the one who a few moments later did so. It was Miss Ford. He followed her fine, retreating back with a look of deliberate speculation. It was quite probable that she had looked in on the committee of Congressmen; following up the work already accomplished by Jeff Davis' henchmen! By jings, she was not to beguile them into stalling him off as they had done all spring, and as Jinny's tale would indicate they planned to continue to do all summer! He must have the answer now, so that before he slept that night, his decision on McClellan could be made.

He rose and strode into his office.

Senator Garrett Davis of Kentucky, acting as chairman, spoke quickly when Lincoln entered and took his place at the top of the table.

"Mr. President, we must ask for another month in which to sound out our colleagues."

Lincoln thrust both great arms, palms upward, along the table. For a moment, emotion choked him. His hair lay damp with sweat on his forehead. His lips quivered. Then he spoke, his voice at first only a hoarse whisper.

"I beseech you, make the decision now! You cannot, if you would, be blind to the signs of the time. I beg of you a calm and enlarged consideration of them, ranging, if it may be, far above personal and partisan politics."

Davis tossed his head impatiently. "You belittle us, sir."

The President's voice gathered strength and clarity. "This proposal makes common cause for a common object, casting no reproaches upon any. It acts not the Pharisee, the changes it contemplates would come gently as the dews of heaven—not rending or wrecking anything. Will you not embrace it? So much good has not been done by one effort in all past time, as, in the providence of God, it is now your high privilege to do. May the vast future not have to lament that you have neglected it!"

There was a moment of silence. This group of neutrals was moved by Lincoln's extraordinary eloquence, as were all his contemporaries, always, but the spell was only ephemeral.

Davis cleared his throat. "We must ask you to excuse us for another month, Mr. President."

Lincoln gave him a clear look. "Senator, you must vote *now.*" A murmur swept the group. A murmur that was punctuated by angry ejaculations.

"You are unwise to try to force the decision, Mr. Lincoln," declared Davis. "We are agreed that we can do nothing until we know more."

Lincoln looked about the room. Not one of the twenty-seven men present whom he had not labored with, individually! It was his will against the cunning of the Ford and Taylor gang, he told himself. Slowly the muscles on his long jaw showed themselves in knots. Slowly his lips stiffened and hardened. Slowly he clutched both great fists and brought them down on the table. "Take your vote, here and now, Davis!" he shouted in a voice that could have been heard on Pennsylvania Avenue.

A tumult of protest greeted this. Lincoln came to his feet and stood there, long arms dangling, head drooping, great eyes burning, first on one man then on another. He felt as though he were indeed made of rock; that he could outlast any storm precipitated by any man in the room. And he proposed to coerce them by his very immobility.

The storm lasted for perhaps a quarter of an hour. Then men began to glance askance first at Lincoln, then at one another. When he perceived this Lincoln spoke quietly to the Senator from Kentucky.

"I'm waiting for you to take that vote, Davis."

Suddenly the Senator nodded to George Nicolay, who immediately passed slips to the committee members. A little later, Davis gave Lincoln a look, half sneering, half triumphant. The vote stood twenty against, seven for compensated abolishment. In other words, only an unimportant minority would recommend the plan to their home States.

When the Committee had gone, Lincoln walked deliberately over to his desk on which the lovely light of summer afterglow was falling and taking up his pen, began to make notes which he headed,

"What I Know."

"McClellan—organizer but no fighter. Bring him back to protect Washington. Send rest of Army of Potomac to Pope.

"Taking of Richmond of prime importance in effect on minds of both sides.

"Must move fast or (1) England will intervene, this year, (2) McClellan will try to make himself dictator. (3) McClellan as dictator would wreck the Union and save slavery.

"If I emancipate the slaves I shall save the Union and probably be shot.

"If I do not emancipate the slaves, I cannot save the Union and shall not be shot.

"If the North does not win this war, democracy will be a failure upon this earth."

Having written thus far, he paused, moved nearer to the window, for the twilight was deepening and with a smile of whimsical sadness he permitted himself to add one bit of sentiment:

"To die; to sleep; no more; and by a sleep, to say we end the heartache, and the thousand natural shocks . . ."

He broke off abruptly, folded the paper and thrust it into his pocket. Still keeping his mind strictly to the work at hand, he pulled a fresh sheet of paper toward him and wrote at the top, "Emancipation Proclamation," following with slowly thought-out sentences, set down in his cramped, uneven hand.

He had not written a half dozen lines when John Hay came to the door, and stared at the bent figure silhouetted against the window. He peered at his watch, hesitated, then walked firmly across the room. Perhaps nonsense would rouse the President when a call to supper would surely fail.

"Mr. Lincoln," he said solemnly, "Richard II is to be played by Hackett, to-night. Unless you at once, eat, ensark and bifurcate dischrysalisize, you will miss the second act, let alone the first."

Lincoln lifted his head with a jerk. "Say it again, slowly, John!" with solemnity equal to the young man's.

John repeated the words and with his inimitable laugh, the President thrust the manuscript into his breast pocket and fled to his room.

In an astoundingly short time he and his two young secretaries were starting for the theater. As they passed through the lower hall, a brawny, long-legged soldier, who had been gaping at the entrance to the East Room came up to Lincoln, hand extended.

"I'm from Indiany!" he announced.

"So am I," replied Lincoln. "I almost wish I was back there again."

"That's just what I was wishin', myself." The big fellow nodded understandingly. "But instead of that I've got to go back to camp. Ain't they aworkin' ye pretty hard, Mr. Lincoln?"

"I reckon they are," answered the President.

"Well, now, some of us boys was saying so. You'd better take right smart good keer of yourself. There ain't anybody else layin' round loose to fit into your boots right now."

"You give the boys my thanks, sir!" Lincoln shook the Hoosier's big hand heartily and hurried into his carriage where he chuckled immoderately all the way to the theater.

CHAPTER XXII

THE RUNAWAYS

ON a burning July afternoon, a day or so later, Secretary Stanton's baby was buried. Mrs. Lincoln had just left for a visit to New York, but Lincoln attended the funeral, taking with him in his carriage, Seward, with Seward's son and daughter-in-law, and the Secretary of the Navy, Gideon Welles.

The occasion was, of course, particularly poignant to Lincoln, but he gave himself no opportunity to indulge in grief. The Stantons were living for the summer in a house several miles northwest of Georgetown. The ride to and from the funeral was long and oppressive. Dust settled heavily on the occupants of the carriage. Young Mrs. Seward's little black sunshade turned a rich tan before the first mile was covered. Welles' white beard took on a youthful brown. The lovely landscape was visible only through a hazel fog. The horses panted, while the harness worked up a muddy lather.

Of the extraordinary physical discomfort of the ride, Lincoln was scarcely conscious. All the way out to the Stantons' he was debating with himself whether or not to sound out the two Secretaries on the subject of emancipation. On the way back, he suddenly decided to make the plunge. Welles gave the opening when he said:

"General McClellan's campaign is singularly depressing in its effect on the public. Greeley is again talking peace at any price, I see."

Lincoln nodded. "I reckon we've about reached the end of our rope on the plan of operations we've been pursuing. Things are going from bad to worse. We've played the last card of the original plan, in the campaign against Richmond. Now we've got to change tactics or lose the game."

"What do you propose?" asked Welles.

"I propose," replied the President, looking from Welles to Seward, "to issue a proclamation emancipating the slaves."

"Good God!" ejaculated Seward.

"This is a sudden change on your part, Mr. Lincoln!" exclaimed Welles.

"I'll make any change necessary to save the Union," retorted Lincoln. "This is a military not a political move—a military necessity. What do you think of it, Seward?"

"It's too momentous a question for me to answer off hand. You've taken my breath away," replied the Governor.

"And mine!" Welles shook his head.

Lincoln felt almost a shock of surprise. His own preoccupation with the idea of emancipation had been so constant and deep that he had not realized how little careful thought the members of the Cabinet had given it. Abolition, outside of the small radical group, was still looked upon as fantastic, impossible, by the general public, he knew. But he had thought it was otherwise with his Cabinet? He began to explain, patiently and clearly, his reasons for the move.

Seward, wiping his tired face, constantly, with a large silk handkerchief, shook his head and murmured ejaculations to himself, as he listened. Welles chewed at his beard, blinking like a thoughtful old owl. The two younger Sewards' excitement and apprehension were apparent in the tensity with which they sat erect, staring at the President.

"I see Sumner's hand in this!" exclaimed Seward, when Lincoln had finished.

"Sumner knows nothing about it," declared the President. "You two are the first I've mentioned it to, and I reckon you'd better say nothing until I can bring it up at a Cabinet meeting. What's your idea, Welles?"

"I had supposed your ideas were identical with the Cabinet, sir. We've all felt that this was a local domestic subject, appertaining to the states, respectively, and that they'd never parted with their authority over it," said the Secretary of the Navy, with his usual Yankee caution. "But the reverses before Richmond will change our ideas about many things, undoubtedly."

"Something drastic must be done, of course," said Seward. "I'll have to give my mind to a solution. I'm not at all sure you've found the right one, Mr. Lincoln."

"You'd better give it special and deliberate attention, Governor," Lincoln eyed the Secretary of State with the little sense of amusement Seward's self-assurance always gave him, "because I'm going to put the foot down, very shortly. And while the situation is delicate, the foot is not!" This, with a quiet smile at young Mrs. Seward on whose silk skirt he had trod, earlier in the afternoon. He then began to talk of the hopeful conditions around New Orleans.

He went out to the Soldiers' Home that night, where Tad and Miss Ford were to stay during Mary's absence. When his wife was away the President led a completely erratic existence, eating, dressing, and sleeping as he pleased. When he rode his horse slowly up to the steps of the cottage it was nine o'clock, and he was quite unconscious of the fact that he'd had no supper. He had come out to see Miss Ford, and he had thought of nothing for the past two hours but what he was going to say to her. He had not made up his mind when he came upon her.

She was sitting in a rustic chair on the lawn, a dim, white figure in the starlight. Lincoln crossed the lawn behind her, and dropped into the chair opposite before she was aware of his presence.

She gave a little gasp of surprise, then drawled, easily, "I've found the one cool spot in a burning world. Actually there is a touch of breeze, now and again."

Lincoln unbuttoned his white linen coat and tossed his old hunting cap to the ground. "I hope Mrs. Lincoln is getting a little let up from heat," he sighed. "How's Taddie?"

"Very well indeed, and exceedingly active."

"I don't doubt it," laughed the President. "Anything of a criminal nature, to-day?"

"Can't tattle on my pupil, Mr. President! That's my best hold on him." The Virginian's voice had the tender inflection that always was apparent when she spoke of Tad.

Lincoln, as usual, caught the inflection and sighed. If only she were not so kind to his children! But he must begin somewhere. Without premeditation, he asked:

"Sister Ford, how'd you like another job?"

"I'm perfectly satisfied with this one," she replied, promptly. "There! Feel that little breeze on your cheek? Heavenly!"

"It's what you call a *regular* kind of a job, so I don't suppose you'd enjoy it like this one. I want you to resign from Jeff Davis' pay, and work for me."

A silence broken only by cricket and katydid. Then the Virginian sat forward in her chair. "What are you talking about, Mr. Lincoln?"

The President felt quite calm and clear, now. "I'm talking about your work. You remember that night Mrs. Frémont called on me? You gave yourself away then, and I've been watching you ever since. I had my mind all made up to settle with you, before my darling Willie left us. Then you were such an angel to him, that I couldn't."

"What have I done to merit this?" exclaimed Miss Ford, leaning forward in her chair so that Lincoln could see the dark outline of her perfect features.

"You've helped McClellan make a fool of himself. You're too close to the fountain-head on both sides of the line, Sister Ford. Either you must go down to Richmond and stay there, or you must take a job I can get you in Vice President Hamlin's family in Portland, Maine. Reckon you'd be far enough from McClellan then to dull your claws."

"My dear Mr. Lincoln," with an amused little laugh, "I'm not dependent on a 'job' as you call it, for my daily bread. I've been taking the stipend from Mrs. Lincoln because she wouldn't let me stay, otherwise. And I've wanted to stay—to be near you."

"True enough—I'm the fountain-head!" Lincoln's voice was grim.

"No! You shall not misinterpret me on that point, Abraham Lincoln!" raising one slender hand in dramatic protest. "My love for you is more real to me than the whole slavery cause. You shall not belittle or besmirch that!"

"You go down and love Jeff Davis the same way you have loved me," sardonically, "and my speculation is that Richmond will fall within a month. First time I ever heard treachery called by that name."

The Virginian sprang to her feet, and the President rose to his.

"This is beyond endurance!" she protested.

"Exactly!" agreed Lincoln. "You're like a fellow I knew on the Sangamon who—"

"No!" cried Miss Ford. "Not one of your stories at this moment! I could not bear it!"

"I was merely trying to let you down easy, Sister Ford," said Lincoln, gently. "If you will have it that way,—to-morrow you must start for Richmond."

"Do you mean to tell me that without Mrs. Lincoln's knowledge or sanction,—or does she know you were about to do this, and left for this reason?" demanded Miss Ford.

"She hadn't the least notion of this happening in her absence," replied Lincoln. "Now, dear Sister Ford, what is the use of putting on or carrying on about this? You've been doing what you could for your cause. I've caught you at it."

"Who has maligned me? That brown cat, Jinny? I'll have her whipped. I'll take her myself to Fairfax Court House and see it done. The lying Jezebel never has forgiven me about Zeb. I'll teach her!"

Her anger was the more terrible to observe because she did not raise her voice as she raged. Lincoln allowed her to vent her spleen on Jinny for some moments, then he put his hand on her shoulder and said with a patient sort of gentleness:

"My dear, what's the use? I have my work to do, and I must safeguard myself until it's done. After that, no matter. You are a menace to the Union to a degree that perhaps you do not realize, for I truly believe you wish to save the Union. I dare no longer permit my liking for you, my gratitude to you, keep you in my household. To-morrow, you shall start for Richmond."

"I shall not!" for the first time raising her voice.

"It shall be done quietly, with one of Baker's men as escort. I've told Baker nothing so far. How much he learns depends on the degree of your docility."

"You hate me! You speak in a voice of hate! You touch me as you would touch an unruly horse. God! This is my Nemesis and it's more than I can bear. No country, no cause is worth it! God, do you hear me?" raising her face hysterically to the stars. "I repudiate my country and the cause of slavery! I repudiate Jefferson Davis! I am wholly Abraham Lincoln's!" Her voice rose to a scream. "God, do you hear me? Give me a sign! Give me a sign!"

"Hush! Don't tempt Him!" Lincoln shook her gently. "Go in the house, and have Jinny pack you up, for you must return to the White House, to-night, with me."

He could feel her tall body shaking as with a chill.

"I shall not go!" she screamed.

"Come! Lean on my arm!" commanded the President.

Suddenly, she broke down. Weeping heavily, she put her head against his shoulder. "Don't send me away! Don't send me away! Lock me in a room in the White House. Only let me be under the same roof with you."

"Hush! Every window up at the cottage has a listener. Come, let's go find Jinny."

She drew a shuddering breath, then slowly moved away from him. "I will find her without your help," she said, brokenly.

The President stood without moving a muscle until she entered the lighted hallway. Then, with a great sigh, he dropped into his chair.

An hour later, the carriage and his saddle horse, at the President's order, appeared at the door. Lincoln crossed the lawn and sent a servant for Miss Ford. After a considerable delay, the servant returned with the information that neither Miss Ford nor Jinny could be found.

"Go and make a real hunt, of every building," ordered Lincoln. "One of you get ready to ride my horse back to town with a note to Colonel Baker."

He was perfectly sure that the Virginian was not to be found at the Soldiers' Home. He felt decidedly sheepish as he wrote a note to Chief Baker of the Secret Service; sheepish, a little relieved, and somewhat troubled. He had wanted to remove Miss Ford, and to be very sure of her whereabouts before he took further steps in emancipation. He had done only half his job. He remained at the cottage until Baker arrived, then he drove back to Washington.

It was not until morning when he woke with a dizzy headache that he remembered that he'd had no supper!

He sent for Charles Sumner immediately after breakfast. The Senator, immaculate in a cream linen suit, a rose in his buttonhole, appeared while Lincoln was listening to a violent debate between Welles and Stanton. The President lounged in a favorite attitude, deep in a chair, his feet on the mantel. Stanton walked the floor, Welles sat erect and uncompromising at the Cabinet table.

"I hope I don't intrude, sir!" Sumner paused beside Lincoln.

"Not at all, Charles! Welles and Stanton are having a debate on the matter of a bill. You remember last spring when the *Merrimac* sunk the *Cumberland,* and the Congress and we all were scared to death for fear she'd steam up the Potomac to Washington?"

Sumner nodded solemnly, but Lincoln laughed. "Stanton had the shakes a little mite worse than the rest of us. At least he made more noise and confusion. You did, Stanton! Don't glare at me or you'll give me the shakes now!"

"Your levity is ill-timed, sir," said Stanton, savagely.

"Perhaps so! Perhaps so! But I haven't forgotten that you sneered at Welles when he said that the *Monitor* would lick the *Merrimac.* Welles is getting to be a good deal of a navy man. He didn't know the rear from the front of a boat when he began, but he does now."

"Father" Welles smiled dryly. Stanton pulled his beard and waited impatiently for the Chief Executive to give him the floor. But Lincoln was hoping that a little delay would cool Stanton down and he had no objection to trying to puncture some of the Secretary of War's egotism.

"Stanton," he went on, "got me so scared that I consented to his having sixty canal boats loaded with stone ready to sink across the channel at Kettle Bottom Shoals. He went over Welles' head and ordered the navy yard to prepare the boats. Welles was peevish about this, and Stanton, to soothe him, agreed that the War Department should bear the expense. Of course, they were never needed, and are moored by the river bank, now." With a quiet chuckle, "And now Stanton wants Welles to pay for the fleet. Stanton's navy! It's as useless as the pap of a man to a sucking child. There may be some show to amuse the child but they are good for nothing for service."

"My God, but you're disgusting, Lincoln!" shouted Stanton, and he flung himself toward the door. "I'll pay for the boats rather than risk another interview like this."

"Father" Welles suddenly burst into a cackling laugh, gathered up his papers and departed.

Sumner, who had winced at Lincoln's simile, stood eyeing him speculatively. Lincoln smiled serenely.

"Charles, Sister Ford ran away, last night."

"What!" gasped the Senator. "With whom?"

"With Jinny," dryly from Lincoln. "I've been meaning for some time to tell you of what I suspected the lady." He gave the story in detail, adding, "I told her she could have her choice between going to Richmond or to Hamlin's family up in Maine. I implicated no one. Told her she gave herself away during that interview of Mrs. Frémont's."

Sumner groaned. "I've long been uneasy about her. Too bad! Too bad! Did she confess?"

"Not precisely. She did considerable sputtering, but finally seemed to agree that she'd pack and come back to Washington with me, on her way to Richmond. She went into the cottage out at the Soldiers' Home and she and Jinny disappeared while I was waiting. I put Colonel Baker on the case."

Sumner groaned, then said, "You did quite right."

"You feel as I do, Charles—a cross between virtue and remorse. You see, I wanted to make an important move and it seemed best to have her out of the house. Reckon I fumbled badly. Don't know where she'll break out, now."

"Oh, she and all her kind can't stop Destiny's march!" exclaimed Sumner. "What move have you planned, Mr. Lincoln?"

"The inevitable one, I hope, Senator. The present Congress has done almost all it can, unless you have something up your sleeve that I don't know about. Let's see. It's prohibited all persons in the army and navy from hunting or returning fugitive slaves. It has restored the Missouri Compromise. It has abolished slavery in the District of Columbia, and provided for the education of colored children here. It has recognized the independence of Hayti and Liberia. It has passed the Confiscation Act, destroying title in slave property as a punishment for treason or rebellion. It's given me power to use contrabands as soldiers. It seems to me that, if my Cabinet recapitulates the work of the Congress, it can't fail to see that mine is the next step—emancipation."

Sumner had been leaning against the mantel, listening attentively to Lincoln. As the President uttered the last word, the Senator started as if he had been struck. He stared at Lincoln as though he could not believe his ears.

"What!" he said. "Emancipation! At last! Lincoln! Do you truly mean it?" He seized the President's hands. "You will issue a proclamation?—Truly 'mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord.' "

His face worked. He dropped Lincoln's hands, turned to rest his head on his arm along the mantel and wept.

The President felt his own eyes sting. He took a turn up and down the room. Then he cleared his throat and said:

"The North is not really ready for it. I'll meet much opposition. It will damn my political future—I'm inclined to be grateful for that.—But it's the next military step in the saving of the Union. With their slaves at home to free the men for service, the Rebels have too great an advantage over us. Whether or not the North has suffered enough to swallow it, I don't pretend to know. When I'll issue it, I don't know. Charles, I want you to go up to Massachusetts and make a close canvass of the situation up there, both military and political, with relation to such a move."

Sumner had fully recovered himself. He smoothed his hair and necktie. "Quite right, sir, and wise, as usual. I'll be going home to-night."

He had reached the hall when the President, recalling certain information, hurried after him and buttonholed him near the stairhead, where the passing visitors stared curiously at the two enormous figures.

"Charles," whispered Lincoln, "it's highly probable that you'll be subject to murderous attack, after this thing is out. Guard yourself all you can."

"How can one guard against a villain?" asked Sumner in a wondering whisper. "Don't be anxious, sir. The Almighty is directing this matter." He squeezed the President's hand and was gone.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE SOLDIERS' HOME CEMETERY

REPEATED thunderstorms toward the last week of July made Washington slightly more endurable. Mrs. Lincoln returned from her visit to the North with wonderful new material for dresses, and established Lizzie Keckley in her bedroom for an orgy of sewing. The trip had done her good. Her nerves were steady. A little of her lovely color showed again in her cheeks. But she looked her husband over with considerable dissatisfaction. He had lost weight, and she saw new lines around his mouth and eyes.

"You look," she said, with a sad little grimace, "as if you've been living on what you picked out of the mousetrap! I thought of you every time I put a taste of food to my lips. You sit down in that chair and I'll send for a glass of milk this minute."

She had been in the house for several hours, but the President had been locked in Stanton's office with General Halleck who had come to take over the General-in-Chiefship. He had hurried to the sitting room the moment he had been released. He held Mary tightly while she chided him, a complacent smile on his lips.

"Jings! It's good to have you spank me again! Don't go away again this summer, wife! Wait till things are more cheerful with the country."

"The war looks bad East and West, doesn't it!" agreed Mary. "I suppose the raising of 300,000 more men has taken what little appetite from you my absence didn't. Do sit down, my dear, and rest, just for a moment, and I'll ring the bell for the milk."

But he would not release her. He clung to her as something warm and intensely human that anchored him once more to the sweet and simple and homely things that were his birthright. He seated himself, holding her on his knees as he did Tad, and looking down into her face with something of the feeling, he was sure, that Taddie experienced when he felt for his mother's hand in the dark.

"Now! Go on and scold me some more, darling Mary," he begged, "while I purr like an old Tom cat!"

She smoothed his hair back from his forehead. He closed his eyes with a sigh. "What shall I scold about, first?" she asked tenderly. "Shall I scold you because I see you are carrying every dead soldier on every battlefield as a notch on your living heart? Shall I scold because you make no reply to the dreadful things the newspapers are saying about your neglect of McClellan?"

Lincoln opened his eyes. "I've asked Dahlgren to make me an invention. Something to use the gas escaping from newspaper offices for war purposes."

Mary laughed, then went on with her inventory. "Or shall I scold you for wearing this heavy coat when your closet is full of linen suits?"

"Whatever interests you most, wife. Only keep on! Might say a few words about my sending Sister Ford off, as I wrote you."

"I think you did exactly right. I'm sorry for poor Jinny, though," declared Mary.

"Jinny can take care of herself and Sister Ford too," relaxing, with a sigh of relief, against the back of the arm chair. "You've seen Taddie, of course."

"Yes, he's been with me all the afternoon. What sort of a boy has he been?" asked Mary, re-making the President's tie.

"He's been the one bright spot in a fog of trouble," replied Lincoln, beginning to chuckle. "Stanton seems to be very fond of him, and he fixed him up a Lieutenant's commission and gave him twenty-five old useless guns. Tad built an arsenal in the basement and drafted every servant and employee on the place for his Company. John Hay and George Nicolay were the only ones who escaped. The first day all went well, but that night your gardener, Halliday, started to go down town. Tad saw him heading for the street and he went out and arrested him as a deserter. He was very earnest about it, and furious that Halliday wouldn't take him seriously. He dragged the fellow up to my office and appealed to me as Commander-in-Chief to force Halliday to submit to arrest."

"What did you do!" exclaimed Mary.

"I stopped Cabinet proceedings while I pardoned Halliday; then I persuaded Tad that he would be doing a real service if he formed a little company of poor boys who couldn't get drill, otherwise. He finally agreed that if I'd let him feed the boys, once a day, he'd disband his present company."

"Good gracious! Is he feeding twenty-five boys here, every day?" cried Mary.

"No, only ten," replied the President soothingly. Then he added, "I knew I'd dig up something you could really scold me about, if I tried long enough."

Mary suddenly kissed him and jumped to her feet. "Speaking of food, shall I send for that milk, or will you promise to come to supper, the moment the bell rings?"

"I promise. Do I have to change my clothes?" looking at her without much hope.

For reply, Mary rang the bell and when James appeared, she said, "James, will you help the President get into a white linen suit? He is very tired, James. Give him an alcohol rubdown, do."

"Yes, Madam. He sure is very tired. I'm glad you're back, Madam, for he sure ain't himself with you away."

The colored man offered his hand to Lincoln to pull him to his feet.

The President took the kind brown fingers and said, with a contented sigh, "A good going over by his mother with a fine tooth comb is what every boy needs, at least once a month, James!"

"Yes, sir, Massa Lincum," grinned James.

"I don't like your implications, Abra'm!" Mary's eyes twinkled, but she watched the two depart with an anxious shake of the head. She never had seen her husband look as weary as he did now.

Carl Schurz came in to supper with John Hay. Lincoln was delighted to see him. The young officer always struck fire from the President's brain. But Mary, with John Hay's tactful help, steered the talk away from politics, and kept it on music, about which Schurz could talk so fascinatingly.

"Mr. Lincoln must rest," she whispered in an aside to Schurz as they all mounted the stairs after supper. "He's mulling over some heavy problem—emancipation, I think—and they tell me he's not been to bed for two nights. Will you play for him, General?"

"Ah, poor fellow, yes!" replied Schurz and on reaching the sitting room, he went straight to the piano.

"I'll just stretch out here on the sofa and rest my brittle old bones for a half hour," said Lincoln, sinking among the cushions as he spoke.

Mary and John Hay moved chairs close to him as if to hedge him from intruders.

"What are you going to play, General?" asked Lincoln.

"A little of Beethoven," answered the officer, "a few Volk Lieder, if you will."

"I will!" sighed the President, closing his eyes, and determined to rest his brain during the half hour by not permitting his thoughts to wander from the lovely pattern of sounds Schurz began to weave. For a few moments the desultory conversation between Mary and John impinged on his concentration:

John:—"Dear Mrs. Lincoln, don't urge me to ask favors of Secretary Stanton. I'd rather make the rounds of a smallpox hospital."

Mary, after a silence:—"I had two nights at Long Branch. Heavenly, except for mosquitoes, human and otherwise!"

John: "Washington is a desert. Not a human being here, as far as social intercourse goes. I miss the ladies, I assure you."

Mary: "When do you find time to miss them? You work twenty-six out of the twenty-four, now!"

John: "You're confusing me with the Tycoon, Mrs. Lincoln. I refuse to work more than twenty hours a day. The remaining four hours I devote to regretting lovely women."

Schurz drifted into a lullaby—

When Lincoln opened his eyes, after a long blank period, he was astounded to see that dawn was shining in at the window, through which floated the song of a redbird in the garden. He still was lying on the couch, with Mary's red shawl over his feet. Some one had removed his shoes.

"God bless her!" he thought. "I've had a real sleep and my brain is clear. I can broach emancipation to the Cabinet, to-day. Yesterday, I was too overwrought."

It was the regular Cabinet meeting morning, with steady rain and so of endurable temperature. The members discussed the feasibility of raising negro regiments, for some time, until Lincoln quietly vetoed the immediate carrying out of the idea, and took from his pocket a rather worn sheet of paper.

"I want to read you a memorandum I've been working on relative to the subject of emancipation. I do not ask your advice, but suggestions as to the handling of the subject will be in order after I have finished."

A stunned silence greeted the reading of the document. Chase was the first to speak.

"That's a measure of great danger, Mr. Lincoln, and goes beyond anything I have recommended."

"What have you recommended, Chase?" asked the President, pushing his chair back from the table that he might cross his knees.

The Secretary of the Treasury replied with the rasping note of hostility in his voice that he could not subdue when he spoke to Lincoln. "I should prefer that no new expression on the subject of compensation be made. The measure of emancipation can be much better and more quietly accomplished by allowing generals to organize and arm the slaves."

"Good God, Chase!" cried Seward. "Are you planning to start a servile war?"

"There's no necessity for profanity, Mr. Secretary," retorted Chase, his handsome face pale with emotion. "Arming the slaves would prevent their massacre by the Rebels in case of emancipation."

"You're insane!" roared Stanton. "I'm for the immediate issuing of that proclamation!"

"So am I!" said Attorney General Bates. "And I'm a conservative, from a slave-holding State, too. What about you and your Abolitionist friends, Chase?"

Lincoln smiled at Bates, gratefully.

"Oh, I consider this action better than nothing," hastily declared Chase, "and so shall support it."

"Wait a moment, do, my friends," exclaimed Seward. "Listen to some facts from my department. Foreign nations, on hearing that proclamation, will intervene, immediately, to prevent freeing the labor that they believe produces cotton only so long as the negroes here are in bondage. And they are right. Issue that proclamation, and we break up our relations with foreign nations and the production of cotton for sixty years."

"And you are the man," said Secretary Welles, dryly, "who after your 'irrepressible conflict' speech in 1858, the New York *Herald* called a more dangerous Abolitionist than Beecher, Garrison, or Parker!"

"I wasn't Secretary of State to a nation in the throes of civil war when I made that speech," retorted Seward.

"I'd like to hear your reasons for issuing the proclamation, Mr. President," said Smith, the Secretary of the Interior.

"So would I," echoed Postmaster General Blair. "I only wish to say that if you issue it, it will cost us the Fall elections."

Lincoln nodded. "The collapse of McClellan's Richmond campaign may be said to be the immediate reason. The decisive element in the test of military strength between the Union and the Secessionists lies in the slaves. In order to take advantage of that element, we must remove two things: prejudice on the part of the Northern whites; lack of motive on the part of the blacks. The check and embarrassment, at this moment, of all the Union armies are putting our people, even the conservatives, in the frame of mind for reprisals on the Rebels. Here is our reprisal," tapping the document against his knee. "Here, also, is the motive which will inspire the slaves to fight."

"You are mistaken at one point, sir!" exclaimed Seward. "You issue this now, following upon the greatest disasters of the war, and people will misunderstand. They will view it as the last measure of an exhausted government, a cry for help; the government stretching her hands to Ethiopia, instead of Ethiopia stretching forth her hands to the government; the last shriek on our retreat."

This was characteristic reasoning on the part of Seward, thought Lincoln, the ounce of common sense in the pound of sophistry.

"There is rising a sure demand that this war and slavery cease together," said Welles, impatiently.

"I have no patience at all," retorted Seward, "with the irrational clamor for making emancipation, instead of national integrity, the object of the war. I have less patience with paper declarations without the support of armies. It is mournful to see a great nation shrink from a war it has accepted, and adopt proclamations where it has been asked for force."

"Don't purposely and cynically misunderstand me on this, Seward," exclaimed the President. "As I have told you before, I expect to maintain the contest until successful, or till I die, or am conquered, or my term expires, or Congress or the country forsake me. I have felt that only the most horrible suffering could induce this country to include the freeing of the slave in the *casus belli*. I had hoped it now had suffered enough."

Seward leaned forward on the table. "Mr. President, you are, I know, determined to issue the proclamation. You do not desire our advice. Yet I venture to beg this of you. Issue the mandate when you can give it to the country supported by military success, or the whole world will laugh at you."

"Derision cannot seriously affect me." Lincoln smiled a little sadly. "But you have given me a new angle. Perhaps the long suffering had best be capped by hope before we offer this to the people. We'll wait for a victory. In the meantime, I ask you all to preserve the utmost secrecy with regard to this. And pray for a victorious McClellan."

A mirthless laugh from Stanton greeted this, and the meeting broke up. Lincoln followed Stanton to the War Office.

Sumner made only a flying visit to his constituents in

Massachusetts. It seemed as if anxiety for the success of the President's "move" made it impossible for him to keep away from Washington. He appeared at the Soldiers' Home, late one sultry Sunday afternoon, to find the President and his wife, with Secretary and Mrs. Welles, drinking lemonade on the lawn, while Tad drove his goat wagon up and down the gravel paths. Lincoln was giving a discourse on trees, taking great delight in tripping Welles as to name and habitat. He greeted Sumner affectionately, and included him in the catechism.

"Come over here by the cemetery," he said, "where the evergreens abound, and I'll show you the difference between spruce, pine, and cedar and a kind of illegitimate cypress I've noticed growing hereabouts. Trees are as interesting to study as men. Each has its own physiognomy."

He rose and strode toward the cemetery, followed unenthusiastically by the company. He looked taller than ever in his white linen suit. The late sun flickering through the trees brought out copper tints in his black hair. Charles Sumner and Mary brought up in the rear.

"The President is popularly supposed to have no interest in nature, or particular love for her," said the Senator.

"That's about on par with the usual misconception regarding my blessed husband!" exclaimed Mary. "How could a temperament as intensely poetic as his *not* love beauty in nature as everywhere! Also, how can one with his awful preoccupations take time to enjoy that beauty? I sometimes think that even his religion is only a manifestation of the poet in him."

"That's interesting," mused Sumner. "Ah, he isn't going to let us off reciting! They're waiting by the edge of the clearing."

But, when they reached the President, he had forgotten the recitation. He was standing with the various, twigs of evergreen in his hand, gazing at row on row of new-made graves.

"I didn't know they'd opened this to volunteers," he said. "Look! Hundreds of them with not even a name or a number!"

His face worked. Deep within him he felt stirring the mood of despair, which he had been fighting ever since McClellan had begun the retreat from Richmond. Welles looked up at him pityingly. Sumner pressed forward and put his hand on Lincoln's shoulder.

"My dear Mr. Lincoln—" he began, but did not continue.

A shot rang from behind an ancient monument. It grazed the President's forehead, took off a lock of Sumner's hair and severed a branch of the "illegitimate" cypress. Almost at the same moment a colored woman dashed out from the trees to the left and flung herself, screaming, before Lincoln. It was Jinny.

"They shan't git you, Massa Lincum! They'll git me first!"

As she shrieked these words another shot rang out. Jinny whirled and fell. A man, stooping, ran from behind the ancient monument into the grove.

The episode had passed with such lightning rapidity that it was over while one could count thirty. Lincoln stooped to pick up Jinny. Sumner started to run after the assassin, but was stopped by Welles, who pointed to James, who, in his white serving coat, a gun in his hand, was galloping across the cemetery, followed by Tom, the coachman, in a bright pink shirt. Mary clasped Lincoln's arm. She was deathly white, but perfectly calm.

"Come back to the house, quickly, Abra'm, before they shoot again!" she begged.

Welles, supporting his wife, who was half fainting, said quietly, "Sumner, if you are not injured, help me with Mrs. Welles."

Lincoln did not speak. He stood with the mulatto woman in his arms, the blood from her breast running over his coat sleeve. She was staring up into his face, trying to tell him something, and he was listening, moving his lips in sympathy with hers. After a moment of agonizing endeavor, she managed to articulate a name:

"Gordon! Gordon!"

Then she died.

"Put her down, Abra'm. We'll send some one to her," urged Mary.

"She saved my life!" said Lincoln, wonderingly, and making no attempt to set his burden down. "She took my bullet. Poor Jinny! Dear, devoted Jinny!"

The tears ran down his cheeks, and thus he bore the slave back through the woods to the cottage, and laid her down on the parlor sofa.

Things moved swiftly, after that. The frightened servants took charge of Jinny's body. Colonel Baker was sent for. Taddie drove his goat into the house, and stabled him in the dining room, which latter fact was not noted for hours. James and Tom returned very shortly. Their man had jumped on a horse, tied a short way into the woods, and had hopelessly out-distanced them, of course, at once. When the two had finished their breathless report to the group assembled in the parlor, the President said to James:

"Boy, how did you happen to be on the job?"

The colored man swallowed a sob. "About ten minutes before that first shot, Massa Lincum, Jinny, she bust into the kitchen, all dust and excitement. We all ain't seen her since Miss Fo'd took her all away. Jinny, she say to me, I'm alone in the kitchen, 'Where's Massa Lincum? Dat man Gordon, he gwine shoot Massa Lincum!'

" 'They jes' went into the woods toward the cemetery,' said I.

" 'You grab a gun and come!' says Jinny.

"She ran out. I took five minutes to load one of Massa Taddie's old guns, and I holler at Tom and run for it after Jinny. We reached the cemetery jes' as that first shot came. . . . Poor Jinny!" his dark face quivered.

"Happy Jinny!" exclaimed Mary, with sudden passion, "whose death saved Mr. Lincoln."

"Don't," protested Lincoln, huskily. "James, is there any chance that the help in the house could be persuaded not to tell this for a while? Supposing you tell them that if this thing is gossiped about it will set me back in my efforts to help the slaves."

"If you call them in here, Massa Lincum," said James, earnestly, "and tell 'em what you want, all the whipping posts in Virginny couldn't drag nothing out of them."

"Call them in, James," said the President. When the man had gone, followed by Tom, Lincoln turned to Sumner:

"Charles, I reckon you'd better go over to the other house and see that the mouths are shut there. As no one has appeared, I suspect the old fellows have observed nothing."

Sumner left immediately and his exit was followed by the entrance of two maids, with James and Tom. The President made his request, and was convinced, as James had been, that these dark lips would be sealed as long as he desired it. He was much moved by the fanatical passion with which they declared their loyalty to him, their faith in him.

When they were gone, he turned to Secretary and Mrs. Welles and Mary. "Somehow I can't seem to stand up under their gratitude. I'm not worth it. Ah, my darling Taddie"—the boy was established on the arm of his mother's chair,—"I should say, Lieutenant Lincoln, you will guard this as a military secret of the Commander-in-Chief, eh?"

"Yes, sa'!" Taddie jumped to his feet and saluted smartly. "And hea' is the a'nica fo' the bump on you' fo'head, Papa day. I was waiting fo' yo' to calm down to give it to yo'!"

Every one smiled and the tension relaxed as the little boy, using his mother's handkerchief, proceeded to sponge the welt that had risen on his father's brow. Lincoln sighed with pleasure under the touch of his small fingers.

"I'm enjoining this secrecy because I want Baker to get this man," he said, as he leaned back with closed eyes, "and because," opening his eyes to look at Welles, "I don't want a lot of reporters ferreting out the relation this may have to the purpose I divulged in the Cabinet meeting. The public must not know that purpose until I am sure they are ready for it."

"Quite right, as usual," agreed Father Welles, sitting bolt upright on the long ottoman, and tenderly supporting Mrs. Welles, who leaned against him.

CHAPTER XXIV

CEDAR MOUNTAIN

MARY could not endure the thought of remaining over night in the vicinity of the tragedy, so, late that evening, when Colonel Baker had finished his long conference with them, the party returned to the city.

Lincoln had lived so close to the thought of assassination, that the fact that it actually had been attempted did not greatly shock him. But he was deeply perturbed at the thought of Jinny's sacrifice. As had Zeb's, her face came frequently between himself and his work on Monday morning, when he settled at his desk.

Taddie and the two dogs were playing "Prisoners" under the Cabinet table when Lincoln came in, and he was glad of the child's society.

In his mail that morning was his first letter from William Russell, and Lincoln read it, eagerly. After a few paragraphs telling of his return to London and of a recurrence of malarial fever, which had laid him low for two months, he said:

"I have only just brought about the interview which I promised to undertake for you. I cannot say whether or not my statements did, or will, have an ameliorating effect on the frame of mind of the person in question. She undoubtedly shares the general English feeling, which is overwhelmingly for the Confederacy and is violently prejudiced against your Administration. The effective blockade of Southern ports by the Federal navy is looked on with great bitterness. You must try to realize how the awful suffering of the cotton operatives in English factory towns has touched her heart. If British recognition of the Confederacy would open her cotton ports, I assure you that recognition would come at once. She believes that freedom for the slaves would starve Europe for cotton for at least a generation. I am, I hope, to have a longer visit at Windsor, this summer, of which I shall write you later.

"The Duke of Argyle and John Bright are the only statesmen for the North. Mr. Gladstone favors the South. Of the London papers only the *Spectator* is for you."

The President finished his letter with a sense of disappointment. He had thought of Her Majesty, Queen Victoria, as a woman of Mary's type, quick to resent, but also quick to understand. However, perhaps the second interview would bear fruit, or at least, show that the first one was not in vain.

Seward entering, at this point in his reverie, Lincoln asked him abruptly:

"Governor, what news from Charles Francis Adams on shipbuilding in England?"

Seward gave an irritated glance in the direction of Pensacola, who did not enjoy the rôle of prisoner, and was voicing his objection. "I've got children, Lincoln," he said, "and I love them, but—"

The President, who, outside the comfortable sense of companionship, had not been conscious of any of the sounds from the prison, now looked over his spectacles at Tad, who peered from under the table with a belligerent expression for the benefit of the Secretary of State.

"I'm not going out, Papa day. I'm in fo' life. I shot my supee-o' offica."

"Not your Commander-in-Chief, I hope, Lieutenant?" asked his father anxiously.

"No, sa'. Only a maja'-gene'al," with a quick look of relief on finding that his father was playing his game.

Lincoln wrote a rapid order on a slip of paper. "Transfer this prisoner to the north portico. Force him to do sentry duty, with cake rations, for two hours." Then he rang the bell for Louis. He read the order aloud when the messenger appeared, adding, "Lieutenant Lincoln admits to shooting a major-general. In some aspects his crime is a public benefit, therefore we exercise leniency. Take him and his two accomplices."

Louis solemnly saluted, took the slip of paper and turned toward the table.

"I'd never move such dangerous persons without shackles," exclaimed Seward. "Here, I'll help! Give us a hand, Mr. Lincoln," and the next five minutes, to Taddie's breathless delight, were spent by the messenger, the Secretary of State and the President in trussing up the prisoners with curtain cords and setting them out in the hall.

Lincoln returned to his desk, wiping his hot face. "Now, as to the building of rebel ships of war in Liverpool, Governor. What's Charles Francis' latest?"

"Mr. Adams is much concerned over a ship, almost completed, known as 290, which certainly is destined for Confederate use," replied Seward. "He can get nothing from Lord Russell, whose complacency is astounding."

"I'd like to see the correspondence in the matter, Seward," said the President, and turned to other business.

Late that afternoon, having read the letters from Adams, Lincoln put on his hat and started out to find Lord Lyons. As he strode rapidly down the north driveway, however, he met the British minister taking the air in his irreproachable landaulet. The President flung up his arm, and the landaulet stopped. The Minister, in spotless black broadcloth, stepped from the carriage.

"I was just going to call on you, my lord," exclaimed Lincoln. "Come over here under the trees a minute, while I tell you what's on my mind."

He led the imperturbable Lyons over to a marble settee, beneath a magnolia.

"Lyons, why don't the English people understand the great principles that underlie this war?" he began abruptly. "Is the fault yours?"

The Englishman gave him a quick look. "No, your Excellency, the fault lies in the principles, themselves, which any European finds alien to his comprehension."

"Do you?" asked Lincoln, wondering if it were possible to get beneath this gentleman's polished surface.

"I've not looked upon myself as an alien, Mr. President. My sympathies have been quickened for both sides. It is painful to observe cousins in a blood feud. I shall be thankful when peace comes."

"Whichever way it comes?" Lincoln arched his brows. "Are you a perfect neutral?"

"Whichever way it comes," insisted Lord Lyons, fanning himself gently with his tall hat.

"So long as the blockade is broken and cotton starts for England!" exclaimed Lincoln.

For the first time, the Englishman showed fire. "The blockade is a cruel weapon, unwisely used as far as its effect on Europe is concerned."

"If you were in my place," asked Lincoln, "would you fight the war gently? Would you prosecute it, in future, with alder stalk squirts, charged with rose water? Is that the British method of warfare?"

Lord Lyons suddenly laughed. "You have me there, your Excellency! But truly, sir, I have made no effort to form British opinion. I have tried to meet each emergency as it arrives. Nothing more! Indeed, nothing more!" with a tired sigh.

"I know," nodded Lincoln. "It's tough going—Lyons, as soon as there is a half victory, here in the East, I'm going to issue a proclamation freeing the slaves. I don't want it known in this country, but I want you to prepare the folks in high places in England for it."

The Englishman's ruddy face burned a deeper shade. He stared through the trees at the gray walls of the War and Navy Building, then turned his keen eyes on Lincoln.

"Such an act will have far-reaching results in Europe, sir."

"You mean England and France will be pacified?"

"I hope they will be," very earnestly.

"Well, I've about given up any idea of pacifying 'em, to tell the truth, but," with a whimsical lift to his lips, "I'll leave 'em not a leg to stand on if they wish to intervene. Get my idea, Lyons?"

"I get it, your Excellency!" The Minister drummed on the curved top of his walking stick in a troubled way.

Lincoln eyed the Englishman. He felt baffled, and told himself that Russell had been wrong in his calculations.

"Too bad I don't speak French," he said grimly.

Lord Lyons looked at him enquiringly.

"They say it's the language of diplomacy. Certainly my kind of English isn't." Lincoln rose as he spoke. "And as for yours—! You might as well be talking Greek to me!"

The Englishman's eyes were puzzled, honestly so, Lincoln thought. The President rubbed his black hair, reflectively, then put out his hand.

"Lyons," he looked down very earnestly, "don't scorn this war as something worthy of contempt, merely because England has never fought a war for such a cause. Believe me when I say that the basic principles over which we are struggling are greater than any for which your country ever has struggled."

The Englishman bowed, and Lincoln, with a sigh, turned back toward his office.

Colonel Baker, a powerfully built man, with a heavy brown beard and a keen gray eye was waiting for the President. Lincoln waved him to a seat, perched himself on the edge of his desk and waited.

"You told me to report all real clews to you, sir. We haven't got on Gordon's trail since leaving the Soldiers' Home, but we've tracked him for the week preceding that time, and, incidentally, that put us in touch with Miss Ford for a moment. He undertook, for McClellan, to get some information about the Rebel forces in Richmond. He was at Harrison's Landing, and claimed that he had means that would take him into Richmond. One of my men had got into Richmond several days before, and he says that, on the night he left that place, he saw Miss Ford, Captain Taylor, and Gordon talking with Jefferson Davis. I might add that my man was perched in a tree, with a good view of Davis' sitting room."

"Do you imply that Jeff Davis is mixed up with any assassination schemes?" exclaimed the President. "Because, I tell you right now, I don't believe it."

"Neither do I," replied Baker. "If Gordon fired that shot, it was a matter of private vengeance on you. But, having fired it, the most sensible thing was to seek safety with Rebels who knew him. I don't doubt Davis will make him useful."

"Well, I hope the three of 'em will stay in Richmond and stop pestering me," declared Lincoln. "That's all I ask of 'em."

"It's not all I ask, by a jugful," grimly, from Baker. "I'm going down to Richmond, myself."

And before the President could finish his protest, the detective had bowed himself out.

It was not the President who suffered from the effects of the attempt upon his life. It was Mary. She endured agonies now, whenever her husband went out of the White House. She was very much alone, during these long summer days. It was extraordinary how much she missed Miss Ford, she told John Hay. If the extremely popular John Hay found Washington hopelessly unsocial that summer, how much more so did Mary Lincoln, all of whose social efforts and successes turned to ashes with the departure of the Virginian! She made no complaints to Lincoln, however, and, absorbed as he was in his work, the President would not have discovered her pitiable state of mind, but for an episode connected with the new campaign in Virginia.

The campaign was forming under Lincoln's urgent touch all the while he was giving earnest thought to the emancipation proclamation.

After reaching the determination to withdraw McClellan from the Army of the Potomac, he did not give a peremptory order to that effect. Instead he told McClellan to bring his forces up to Acquia Creek, a little tributary of the Potomac, about thirty miles south of Washington, and from this spot to send his men to Pope, as Pope might need them. Pope, the first week in August, began to move his army southwest and on August 9th met the superb Rebel fighter, Stonewall Jackson, at Cedar Mountain.

McClellan had received his first order to move to Acquia Creek on August 3rd. It was, of course, a bitter pill for the general to take, for it placed him in the amazing position of having to transfer his troops to Pope, until none were left. On August 9th, he had not reached Acquia Creek.

Late in the afternoon of the 9th, reports of terrible losses at Cedar Mountain, began to reach the War Department. Lincoln, who was in the state of taut nerves usual with him when a battle was in progress, had refused to eat, and was spending the afternoon in Stanton's offices, reading despatches as they came from the hands of the telegraph operators.

"Supposing this turns into a big engagement, Stanton," he exclaimed a dozen times during the afternoon. "McClellan's in no position to help!"

"He wouldn't help if he were in the right position," grunted Stanton. "But you *would* handle the fellow gently! Why don't you get rid of him now?"

Lincoln sighed. Why didn't he get rid of McClellan? Why not send a telegram now? He was asking himself this question the last of the afternoon, when an unwonted interruption occurred. Mary came in, followed by a little middle-aged woman in black. She wore a very modest crinoline and a serviceable scoop bonnet. There was, even to Lincoln's casual glance, an extraordinary intellectual force in her fine eyes and clean-cut features.

"I know I'm not supposed to enter here, gentlemen," said Mary, smiling, "but I have a legitimate excuse. I claim your ear for this lady, Miss Clara Barton, who came to me because she had been unable to reach the President. Miss Barton has collected a whole warehouse of comforts for our soldiers, and she's been doling them out in the most practical manner. But now she has a new idea."

Mary's eager eyes would have won an audience for Miss Barton, had not the newcomer's own manner vouched for her.

"What may we do for you, Madam?" asked Lincoln.

"I want to go where only evil women go," said Miss Barton. "I want to go to the battlefields. I want to give aid to the wounded there, where it is first needed. If I do and succeed, other women will follow me and some day we shall have nurses at the front where they belong. Mr. President and Mr. Secretary, I want to start for Cedar Mountain, *now*."

"It's a preposterous idea, Madam," declared Stanton. "Preposterous! Why should you think of such a thing?"

Miss Barton clasped her hands. She had beautiful hands.

"When those soldiers I'd taught as children came back from Ball's Bluff, last year, and I saw them suffering from neglect—boys maimed and dying who could have been saved on the battlefield,—I resolved that this was the thing I must do, that other women could follow. I've had months of snubbing and evasion, but at last I have Major Ruckett's passports, but I must have more. I must have President Lincoln's word."

"I have no word to give you, Madam," said Lincoln, sadly. "Your kind heart has made you impractical. Of what avail can any woman be in a sanguinary flood like this?"

"Mr. Lincoln," cried Mrs. Lincoln, "if you don't send Miss Barton off with the word she asks, I swear I'm going with her myself, to show the soldiers how the Lincolns feel! Come to think of it, why can't I go? Why wouldn't it be a singularly appropriate thing for me?" The idea took instant hold of her imagination. She glanced about the dull, heavily furnished room, unseeingly. "I must do something for the war! All of you making such sacrifices, doing such good, and I with my idle, empty hands. . . . The White House is a living tomb to my energies."

Lincoln blinked for a moment, then a flood of self-reproach surged to his lips. "My dear wife," he began.

Mary would not allow him to proceed. "Why not? Miss Barton has only shown me what we all know, that succor on the field is one of the crying needs of war. Let me not go down in history as a social nonentity! Let me give my talents and my energy to this idea of Miss Barton's! Let me too go to Cedar Mountain!"

"No, my dear wife!" said Lincoln, decisively. "You must be content with having won Stanton and me to Miss Barton's cause. Eh, Stanton?"

The Secretary of War was touched by Mary's plea. "We'll give Miss Barton our blessing, of course, if that will make Mrs. Lincoln happy. But it's nonsense, her thinking of such a trip for herself."

"Tell the men I have given you God-speed and that my every thought and prayer is with them, Miss Barton," said Lincoln.

"Write it on my passport, Mr. President," cried Clara Barton.

"You are a practical soul! I know you'll succeed." Mary smiled in spite of her agitation.

Lincoln wrote, then took Mary's arm. "I reckon I'd better make the acquaintance of my family, again," he said.

They saw Miss Barton on her way, then, at Mary's urgent request, Lincoln took a short turn with her in the garden.

"You've been warning me against strolling for fear of a bullet," he said with a smile, "but I suppose you can protect me, you darling midget."

"Don't joke about it, Abra'm!" protested Mary, then pausing before a magnificent bed of poppies, petunias and coxcomb, she exclaimed: "There! I had to fight for a bed of old-fashioned things that I knew could bloom in this dreadful Washington August. The gardener, in company with the rest of this charming city, thinks I'm very common in my tastes."

"Can't blame 'em, when they see what you've married!" Lincoln chuckled. "But that bed of flowers just suits my liking. Plenty of color, plenty of smell."

He walked slowly around the bed, his hands clasped behind him. He was wearing a much rumpled linen duster over shirt and trousers, just as he had rushed from his bedroom that morning, at the first words from Cedar Mountain. He was a little faint from lack of food and the vivid mass of flowers with its heavy odor in the sultry heat danced before his eyes in utter unreality.

Mary, with her uncanny intuitions, sensed exactly what was passing in his mind.

"You're trying to appear pleased because you think I need calming down, you dear thing!" she exclaimed. "I don't need that, Abra'm, this time! I wouldn't add a straw's weight to your cares. Enjoy the flowers for yourself or not at all."

Lincoln strode quickly back around the bed to her side. "Mary, are you unhappy?"

She took his arm, and they walked slowly into the kitchen garden, between rows of sweet corn with sharp leaves rasping in the burning wind.

"I'm empty!" she said, finally. "No one but myself realizes how much Willie meant to me. He was the child to count on. He was always there. He understood me and forgave me and admired me. He was the son I always felt would take care of me if anything happened to you."

Lincoln pulled off an ear of corn in the milk, and began to nibble on the silk which lay along the grains. The uneasy contrition he always felt when Mary was in one of these moods crowded out, for the moment, his anxiety over Cedar Mountain. He did neglect her. She was bitterly lonely, and through no fault of hers. All the vital, exhilarating emanations of his mind and soul were going to his work, and only his moments of weariness and dullness were left for her. And, lately, he'd shut her out of the future for which she always had been an inspiration. The more his responsibilities increased, he thought, the more he tended to share his real thoughts with no one. In this, he knew he'd been carelessly cruel to her. She was starving for companionship. Small wonder she turned to Charles Sumner, he thought, or now that Charles was immersed in the politics of emancipation, that she had wished to join Miss Clara Barton.

Mary, pulling a weed here, supporting a gourd plant there, did not interrupt his thinking. She loved the garden, and worked in it frequently, in the early mornings. This was the first time the President recalled having entered this spot, and he resolved, after this, to make it a walking place. It was more like home to him than any place he'd found since leaving Springfield.

"Mary," he said, finally, "you know I'm not at all a versatile fellow, and it's taking every ounce I've got in me to husk out this job. I've wondered lately if I'll ever again be able to love any one the way I'd like to, the way a man ought to. I'll tell you, wife, loving takes time and thought!"

"It does, indeed!" agreed Mary, standing quietly by the raspberry bushes, and eyeing a late variety unseeingly.

"I've neglected you!" he exclaimed, abruptly.

"You should have allowed me to join Miss Barton. You should not deny me the chance to use my brain and strength in this war." Mary's voice was not reproachful. She was only stating facts.

"No, by jings!" cried the President, "that's going too far! Do you imagine for a moment I'm going to allow you to go where there's danger of your life? Willie's death was bad enough. I'd never get over yours."

Tears came to Mary's eyes. She looked up into his face. "I know that you depend on me for physical comforts, dear. But you no longer need me on the mental side. That's what's killing me."

"That's where you guess wrong," declared Lincoln. "I need you mentally as much as I ever did but I haven't

—or rather I've neglected to come to you. For instance, I've been telling myself for weeks that I was going to talk over emancipation with you and I haven't."

"Have you put it up to the Cabinet, yet?" asked Mary, with quick interest.

Lincoln pulled some raspberries, and began to eat them. "Yes, last month I did so. The reaction was typical of each man." He gave a rapid résumé of the Cabinet meeting, ending with the remark, "I shall have no trouble with any of them. Even Chase will fall into line, nasty as he feels toward me."

"No, they'll make no trouble," agreed Mary. "McClellan, the Unready, will be the one to render your proclamation void after you issue it."

"How can he do that?" asked Lincoln.

"He's now the acknowledged leader of the Democratic Party," answered Mary. "As such, he's bound to oppose emancipation."

"But what do you think his move will be?" urged the President.

"Consider his past record, Abra'm. I remember John Hay's reply to me in April, when I asked him for the latest news from the front. He replied with that grandiloquent air of his, 'Pope is crossing the turbid and broad torrent of the Mississippi in the blaze of the enemy's fire, Grant is fighting the overwhelming legions of Beauregard at Pittsburg Landing, while McClellan, our Little Napoleon, sits trembling before the handful of men at Yorktown, afraid to fight.' Then he added, like the real human boy he is, 'Stanton feels devilish about it!' . . . Abra'm, can't you feel devilish about McClellan?"

"No! I like him! . . . This isn't telling me what he's going to do."

"He's going to take your place in the White House if he can. And he's going to make this as nearly a bloodless war as far as his share in it goes as he can, in order to entice the Democrats to putting him there. There will be no decisive victories here, in the East, until you break McClellan, Abra'm. He's your evil genius. What does fascinate you so about him?"

"He's a thoroughly likeable fellow, Mary. And, beside that, he has all the qualities that I lack. He's a scholar, a polished gentleman of the world, and a natural born boss. His men worship him. His staff would die for him. Why shouldn't I like such a man?"

Mary's cheeks flushed. "And you think you lack all those qualities, with your splendid mind and your gentleman's soul. You make me indignant! . . ." She paused to eye him reflectively, while he plucked another handful of berries. "Now I understand," she exclaimed. "We've got back to your ultimate weakness. Your affection for McClellan is causing you the whole trouble. *Weakness,* Abra'm. The failing that's been your curse all your life. And now it's proving to be the country's curse. You *must* get rid of McClellan!"

Lincoln ate his berries dejectedly, pondering on the accusation. Was she right? Was this the answer to the question he'd been asking himself all day? Was his affection for this handsome, debonair, brilliant soldier his real reason for keeping him? At any rate, Mary had given him a new angle, perhaps a helpful angle, on the problem.

He suddenly squared his shoulders. "Come! This isn't helping you any, my dear wife! I've a suggestion for you. When, or if, Miss Barton returns from Cedar Mountain, have a talk with her, and organize your own hospital work along the useful lines she'll suggest. Plan to give at least half of every day to that work, and keep me informed of the conditions in the army that one gets only by contact with the men, which I can't get."

Mary brightened. "It will really help? This is not a mere sop to my wailing?"

"It will really help," replied the President, sincerely.

"And now I must return to torment!" starting slowly toward his office via the kitchen entrance. Mary followed him, but stopped behind in the sweltering kitchen for a talk with the cook. She knew that if she remained longer with the President she could not keep silence about the linen duster!

CHAPTER XXV

BULL RUN AGAIN

THE Northern forces were repulsed at Cedar Mountain, and Pope's Army fell back to the Rappahannock. Still McClellan did not reënforce him. Lee sent a part of his forces to the north to cut off Pope's communications with Washington, and Pope hastily moved back toward Manassas to circumvent him. And still McClellan sent him no men.

These sultry days of August were the most wearying of any Lincoln had experienced. He, himself, had given them a more stupendous significance than they otherwise might have had, by agreeing to postpone the issuing of the proclamation until a great victory would sugar-coat it for public consumption.

Outwardly calm and cheerful, inwardly he was burning with an anxiety that he showed only to his wife, and, occasionally, to young Hay. Nicolay was away a good deal that summer, in the mountains, trying to rid himself of ague, and John Hay was with Lincoln more than ever. The young secretary was conniving with Mrs. Lincoln, constantly, to give the President moments of amusement. Lincoln was conscious of their efforts and grateful for them. But the trip to the Observatory "to take a squint at Arcturus and the moon" which he and John made, was spoiled for him by the fact that the carriage was followed by a lieutenant and eight cavalrymen, the clatter of whose horses he found almost unsupportable.

"Baker and Welles and Sumner are responsible for this!" he groaned to John, on his way back from the Observatory. "It's awful! Let's go to Ford's theater and see what's going on there!"

John, when Mrs. Lincoln greeted them on their late return, insisted that the call at Ford's had been most salutary.

"It was a Sacred Concert of Profane Music," he explained to her, when she half smilingly chided the two whom she found laughing in Hay's room at one o'clock, over a poem of Hood's that Lincoln had clipped. "We had a private box, near the stage, the Tycoon and I, and we carried on a hefty flirtation with the girls in the flies. I will say the Tycoon has a knowing glance."

Mary suddenly pulled the tired young man's face down to hers and kissed him. "I don't know what we'd do without you, John."

Lincoln, sitting with his feet on the window sill, nodded. "I'd kiss him myself, only I'm doubtful about either of us enjoying it."

"You'd better make much of me while you can," declared John, solemnly. "I'm slowly shaking to pieces with the ague. Look!" pointing to the loose buttons on his coat.

"I'll tighten them for you, or get Lizzie Keckley to, if you'll leave the coat with me," said Mary. "Come, Mr. Lincoln, let this boy go to his well-earned rest."

As the President slowly lowered his feet, Mary began to laugh. "Lizzie told me an amusing thing. She was coming up the north driveway behind a couple of soldiers, to-day, and one of them pointed to a second floor window. She says three pairs of feet could be seen on the sill. One of the men said, perfectly seriously, 'The Cabinet is a-setting. Them big feet in the middle is Lincoln's.' "

The President's huge roar drowned John's and tucking Mary under his arm, he ambled off to bed.

But not to sleep. As soon as his head touched the pillow, his mind reverted to McClellan, to Pope, and to his own questionable sanity in keeping faith in the Little Napoleon. Nor was this night an exception to other nights. By the middle of August he was having so few hours of sleep that Mary appealed to Dr. Stone who promptly ordered him out to the Soldiers' Home every night during the remainder of the month. Mary swallowed her prejudice against the place, and moved out for the month and the President, perforce, obeyed, reluctantly riding his horse amidst the attending cavalrymen. The long ride helped him, not so much in sleeping, as in relaxing. At the Soldiers' Home he, as the wise doctor realized, was not within easy access of the telegraph office.

The ride back in the mornings, with Taddie often clattering beside him on his pony, and with Pensacola and Sumter risking their lives among the pounding hoofs, was not so restful. Each rod that they covered brought him an increased sense of burden. The familiar feeling of living in a nightmare would settle on him as he left the shaded country road, and clattered onto the city cobbles, and everything save the impending conflict in Virginia would become unreal to him by the time they reached the White House.

The days crept slowly on, thunderstorms alternating with burning sun. McClellan, moving with unbelievable reluctance and deliberation, did not leave Harrison's Landing until the 17th of August, and did not report himself as available in Alexandria until ten days later.

Pope's campaign had now reached a perilous stage. He and Lee were maneuvering for position. On the 29th of August they met and the second battle of Bull Run was begun.

It lasted for two days.

Lincoln spent practically all of the two days in Halleck's office, observing, in anguished perplexity, the exchange of telegrams between the General-in-Chief and McClellan, watching the fluctuating reports from Pope with growing despondency. Toward mid-afternoon of the 29th, the bickering between Halleck and McClellan got on his nerves; the former giving orders growing more peremptory every hour, the latter giving excuses more or less unsatisfactory for not obeying them. At last Lincoln's patience broke.

"Halleck, in the name of God, doesn't McClellan *want* to reënforce Pope?"

Halleck threw up his hands. Stanton, who had been walking the floor for two hours, without cessation, turned on the President and sneered: "You know he doesn't! I'd call him in and court-martial him for treason, to-night, if you'd keep out of it. Pope says what men he has of the Army of the Potomac are malcontent and insubordinate. McClellan's jealousy and resentment have percolated to the very drummer boys. You'll find that, now McClellan has finally permitted Franklin to start to relieve Pope, he'll arrive there too late."

And Franklin did arrive too late, as did the other army commanders that McClellan finally started toward Bull Run. By Sunday night, August 30th, Lincoln and all the world knew that Pope had been beaten and was again retreating. And not only was he retreating! He telegraphed Halleck that his army was utterly demoralized, and begged to be withdrawn into the defenses of Washington!

Halleck, himself, brought Lincoln this message, before the President was out of bed on Monday morning. Seward, who had come before breakfast for news, and John Hay, both consumed with anxiety, followed the General-in-Chief. Lincoln, having read the message, swung his long legs out of bed, thrust his feet into carpet slippers and began to walk the floor.

"I've sent for McClellan to come to Washington and give us his advice," said Halleck.

Seward uttered an oath, then, with a sudden drawing of his breath that was almost a sob, he said, "Is it true, Mr. Lincoln, that McClellan sent you a letter saying that Pope must get out of his scrape by himself?"

Lincoln did not cease his long, noiseless pacing. "He said we had two courses available! Either to concentrate all available forces to open communications with Pope, or leave Pope to get out of his scrape and use all our means to safeguard the capital."

"What did he mean, sir?" asked John Hay, resplendent in a green and crimson silk bathrobe. "It doesn't seem possible that he could have meant what he wrote."

Seward turned to John. "Hay, what's the use of growing old? You learn something of men and things, but too late to use it. I have only now found out that military jealousy has prevented these generals from acting for the welfare of the country."

"It's something I wouldn't have thought possible!" exclaimed Hay.

"Why should you?" Seward said gloomily. "You aren't old. I should have known it and helped my associates prepare for it."

Lincoln gave no heed to this exchange. His mind was still on Bull Run. "What are our losses, Halleck?"

"Too early for accuracy. Perhaps ten thousand! At least six thousand."

The President wiped his dripping face. "Why did you send for McClellan, Halleck?"

"If he caused this demoralization," replied Halleck, who was trembling with exhaustion, "he'll be the quickest man to end it."

"You go home to bed, Halleck," ordered Lincoln. "See to it that McClellan comes to me, when he arrives."

"Yes, Mr. President." Halleck swayed as he stood.

John Hay and Seward ran to his assistance and helped him from the room.

Waiting for McClellan, that day, Lincoln was so uneasy that for once his sense of humor deserted him, and when a deputation of clergymen visited him, the extraordinary character of their demands irritated him. They demanded that the President prohibit Sunday battles. He showed them to the door with the request that they take their complaints to Jefferson Davis and Lee. He still was glowering a half hour after this, when McClellan came in.

He was sunburned but immaculate. At the look of him, Lincoln's irritation found words. "General Pope, I imagine, has had no chance for a shave for a week."

McClellan who had entered with a pleasant smile on his handsome face immediately scowled.

"What am I to understand by that, sir?" he demanded.

"Sit down, General," waving his hand at the chair beside his desk, "and let's see if we can thresh this thing out."

McClellan obeyed, sitting bolt upright, as though his uniform were of steel.

"Pope," said Lincoln, slowly, "is a first rate officer. He proved that out West. His ideas for handling this Virginia campaign were excellent. There is every probability that he'd have whipped, and really hurt, the enemy if you had coöperated with him. You made a mistake in not doing so, General. You have turned popular opinion against you."

"What is popular opinion to a soldier?" demanded McClellan.

"It should be nothing," agreed the President, with alacrity. "But you are playing politics, McClellan, with more eagerness than you're showing in the military game. So public opinion should count with you. Look yonder!" pointing to an enormous heap of letters and telegrams on the Cabinet table. "Those are all requests from people demanding that I remove you. There are several thousand of them now and they're still coming. There's a petition, I understand, circulating among the Cabinet members, urging me to retire you. That's not good hearing, is it, Mac, for a man of your particular ambitions?"

McClellan had grown noticeably pale under his tan. He stared incredulously at the heaped-up contumely on the table. Nothing was more difficult for him to face than adverse criticism.

"It strikes me," Lincoln went on, "that you're acting stupidly. If you want my job, if you carry out the suggestions that are in the very air you breathe, you'll need more than the Army of the Potomac to back you. You'll need Grant and Burnside and Pope. And now, if I read the signs aright, you'll never have them. They'll be like me, hurt in their most tolerant judgment of you. You failed a brother officer in his hour of need."

McClellan jumped to his feet, but the President reached out a long, hard hand and thrust him gently back into his chair.

"George," his voice husky, "this is the crisis of your life. Be frank with me. You may dare to be. I have a great affection for you,—as if you were a gallant younger brother with advantages I'd never had."

The General's face softened. "What do you wish me to say, Mr. Lincoln?"

"Before I answer that," said Lincoln, "let me ask you if you realize what you've done to Pope? He believes that you wished him to fail. He believes that, at the very mildest, you encouraged your officers to enfeeble their movements by vain regrets that they were fighting under Pope and not you. And the disloyalty, the treasonable taint of it, has broken his spirit. You and your henchmen have put Pope through hell in this month of August and he's broken. He's asked me to remove him.

And the country can ill afford to lose the officer that Pope was a short four weeks ago. . . . What I want you to tell me, George, is why you did it."

"I was utterly unwilling, sir," said McClellan with convincing earnestness, "to leave Washington unprotected, in order to help Pope. I would not be human and not regret that my place had been taken from me. But that regret in no way influenced my actions in the past month. I could not be a soldier and see you civilian politicians throw Washington into the lap of the Confederacy. Pope's campaign was absurd from the inception. Had you sent him, and all his available forces, to me at Harrison's Landing, we'd have been in Richmond two weeks ago." He leaned forward in his chair and looking into Lincoln's face with his unwavering blue eyes, he said, "No matter what pressure is brought to bear on me, sir, I shall make no military move that I know to be absurd."

Lincoln returned his look thoughtfully. Grant could not be spared from the West. Burnside was, in some ways, a feeble sister. Pope was useless, temporarily, at least. And even as he and McClellan sat talking, there was pouring back upon terrified Washington an army of a hundred thousand men, who had left their morale on the malignant flats of Bull Run. If Lee with his intrepid, fast-moving fighting machine knew this, and could gather himself up after the terrific efforts that had culminated in the victory of two days before, he could scatter the Army of Virginia beyond recall. Superb fighters, these Southerners, he told himself, adding, aloud, to McClellan's surprise, "Why not, they are Americans, too!"

Half despairingly he checked these facts over in his mind, while he returned McClellan's look, feeling meanwhile a resurgence of the half-admiring, half-humorous affection that never wholly disappeared from his attitude toward the general. Talk logically as he would, he could not convince himself that McClellan was not intrinsically honest. What a personality, to have become such an influence with his army! Surely that army could go anywhere, do anything, if McClellan would see the light.

"I particularly wish not to quarrel with you, George," said the President, at last. "But I do think it essential, at this moment, to make you see clearly what I know about you. You have said many times and in many ways, that the Administration was made up of imbeciles. That we wished you to fail. That I am a despicable fool. That Stanton is a bad lot. Believing these things, I suppose they form the mainspring for your actions during the past year. Is this so?"

"I beg of you not to insist upon a reply, if you desire to avoid a quarrel, sir. I will say, however, that you have now shown me the source of your resentment toward me."

"I have no resentment toward you, George. I desire nothing so much on God's footstool as your success. No matter what has been said to me, I've clung to you and my old ideal of you. To prove that to you, I'll make a bargain with you. I will give you Pope's job if you will promise me to give back the army its morale and having done this, to start swiftly after the enemy and *hurt* him. If you win a battle, *follow* him, drive him to Richmond and take Richmond if you can. But whether you can or not, move swiftly, move *swiftly, move swiftly!*"

"There's a reverse side to that offer, Mr. Lincoln?" asked McClellan.

"Yes, I reckon there is. But we won't discuss that."

The general came to his feet smartly. "I accept your offer, Mr. President, in the spirit in which it is given. We'll be on the march within the week."

"Good! Good! You may count on the complete cooperation of Halleck and myself."

The two men shook hands and McClellan clattered out.

Lincoln sat by the window alone for the moment, girding himself for the national uproar of disapproval that would greet the reappointment of McClellan. Had he been weak again? He knew what Mary and Stanton would reply to that query. He was more dissatisfied with himself than he ever remembered having been over a decision. And again his dissatisfaction showed itself in irritation when he was interrupted by the breathless entrance of a bearded man in uniform.

"I'm Colonel Stone, Mr. President," he said. "I was wounded in the Peninsular campaign and my wife came down to nurse me. She was drowned by a steamboat collision in Hampton Roads. I've learned that they've recovered her body and I want a pass to go down and get it."

A deep sense of irritation swept over Lincoln. He looked at the officer coldly. "Am I to have no rest?" he ejaculated. "Is there no hour or spot when or where I may escape this constant call on my feelings? Why do you bother me and not the War Office?"

Colonel Stone looked dazed; as if he could not believe this to be the President. "Mr. Stanton refused me," he said.

"Then probably you ought not to go down the river. Stanton knows. If I override his decision it might work disaster on some important movement. You ought not to come here to appeal to my humanity. Don't you know we are in the midst of war, and that suffering and death press on us all? Works of humanity are trampled on and outlawed by war.—You must not vex me with your family troubles. I have all the burdens I can carry. If the War Office won't help you, then bear your burden as we all must until the war is over. Everything must yield to the paramount duty of finishing the war."

Colonel Stone, looking utterly crushed, withdrew. Lincoln saw, with a sort of pleasure, that he had hurt the man. He'd proved to one person, at least, that he was not always soft!

CHAPTER XXVI

ANTIETAM

AT first peep of dawn, the next day, after a sleepless night, Lincoln with his yawning escort started for the White House. He reached there before six o'clock, and dismissed the lieutenant. Then he went down through the kitchen and the kitchen garden to elude the guard, and made a successful escape to Pennsylvania Avenue. He strode among the charwomen at Willard's Hotel and asked the astounded desk clerk for Colonel Stone's room. A moment later he was pounding on a door on the second floor.

The Colonel in rumpled uniform admitted him. Lincoln seized his hand. "Colonel Stone," he exclaimed, "I was a brute, yesterday. I have no excuse for my conduct. I was tired, but that's no reason I should be rude to a man who has offered his life for his country, much more, a man who has come to me in great affliction. I've had a regretful night. Will you forgive me?"

"God knows I'd forgive you more than that, Mr. Lincoln!" exclaimed Colonel Stone. "I never realized the stress you were under until yesterday afternoon. Don't give me another thought, sir."

"But you didn't sleep yourself, Colonel, last night, and 'twas my fault," insisted Lincoln, glancing at the untouched bed. "You go to the War Office, this noon. You'll find your passport there. No, don't thank me! I don't deserve it."

And he was gone.

As he passed through the lobby, he came upon Lizzie

Keckley. He paused. "Well, Lizzie, what are you doing here at this ungodly hour?"

The mantua-maker looked up at him in surprise. "I have just delivered a dress that I finished last night. I'm now on my way to the White House."

"Come along then, we'll both use shank's mare. Getting Mrs. Lincoln all fixed for the winter?"

"No, sir, I'm not sewing for Mrs. Lincoln now, Mr. President. I had news for her. I'd like to repeat it to you, sir, if you're willing."

They were moving along Pennsylvania Avenue, Lizzie at a trot to keep up with Lincoln.

"I'm all ears, Lizzie. You ought to be drawing pay on Baker's staff, I reckon."

"I've discovered Miss Ford. There's a house on F Street, very elegant, that's known to have been disreputable. All the blinds kept down, and all that. Well, one of my girls left me, last spring, and set up for herself. She came to see me, yesterday, and said she'd been sent for by a person living in that house, who signed herself Mrs. Ogden-Ames. And that she was so hard up she'd taken the risk of harming her trade and had gone. She said Mrs. Ogden-Ames was very tall with violet eyes and *black* hair. She asked Anna where she'd learned her trade, and luckily Anna didn't mention me, because she was afraid I'd be cross at that kind of a connection. The lady probably made up her mind that Anna was just a plantation nigger, so she wanted to hire her as a personal maid and seamstress and take her to Europe. Said her own maid had run away."

They were in the White House grounds now, and Lincoln led the way to the kitchen garden.

"Anna was excited over the prospects of going to Paris, so she accepted, and then came to me, last night, to tell me of her good luck. She said the house seemed empty of all inmates, and that only Mrs. Ogden-Ames and an old serving man named Uncle Bob were there."

"What made you suspicious?" asked Lincoln, beginning to eat dew-wet raspberries.

"Well, you see, at first, Mr. President, I didn't suspect anything and I went round with Anna to carry her luggage. Uncle Bob let us in the back way. The whole front was dark, but from the kitchen you could see a light in the dining room. Uncle Bob said he was just serving supper, and that I was to leave before he was called into the dining room. I'd never been inside one of these houses, and I wasn't going without trying to see what I could. I nodded to Uncle Bob and went out into the back yard. I watched through a crack in the shade until Uncle Bob went into the dining room. Then I slipped into the back hall, then into the front hall and peeked through the curtains. Mr. President, Miss Ford, with her hair dyed black, was having supper with a tall, handsome officer, dressed like a Federal, but she called him 'Tom.' It was certainly Captain Tom Taylor. I had a chance to listen to only a few sentences, because they came out into the hall and Captain Taylor left.

"I can't remember whole sentences like Jinny does. But they were talking about when you'd get your nerve up to issuing an emancipation proclamation. They were saying that if General McClellan got control of the army again, it would be best to make him a bold offer from Jefferson Davis. When Captain Taylor said that Miss Ford laughed at him, she said that nothing could change General McClellan's loyalty to the North. She said his honor was perfect. And Captain Taylor asked her if the General's honor was more than the Secessionists had who had deserted the North.

"Miss Ford didn't answer that. But she said she'd seen Mr. Mercy the day before, and he'd told her France was anxious to come in here the minute England would join. He said the sympathy of the French Emperor was all for the South. And she said Horace Greeley had asked the French Minister to get his country to come in to make peace."

"I knew that last," interjected Lincoln. "Greeley's got the shakes."

"Then Miss Ford said she'd go to England the minute Captain Taylor told her to. And that was all."

"You should have gone to Baker at once, Lizzie," said the President, gravely.

"It was past midnight then, sir," said the mantua-maker.

"Well, no use criticizing! You go to Baker's office now. Here, take my card," scrawling a line to the Colonel.

"Yes, sir. Will you tell Mrs. Lincoln, sir? She's so anxious and won't be relieved till she knows Miss Ford and her friends are shut up."

"Smart woman, Sister Ford," mused Lincoln. "Yes, I'll tell the Madam. Slip along, now, Lizzie."

He made his way up to his room, musing sadly. Much as he feared her machinations, he still retained a sense of grateful affection for the Virginian. Then he promptly forgot the whole affair, for James met him on the stairs and told him that Sumner was waiting for him in his office.

The Senator from Massachusetts had heard it rumored that McClellan had been re-instated, and he was there to protest with all the eloquence at his command against "once more imperiling the nation and emancipation by this terrible military incubus."

The rest of that day was spent by Lincoln in listening to bitter comments on what he had done. He did not blame even the members of the Cabinet for their outspoken censure. Stanton, in a heartbroken sort of anger, washed his hands of McClellan. Seward remarked that McClellan was the hope of the Confederacy, and the sure forerunner of intervention from England and France. "One more Federal defeat here, and the Confederacy will be recognized," he said. Even Father Welles expressed himself as humiliated by the President's weakness.

Lincoln was extraordinarily gentle. "Yes, he's acted badly toward Pope," he admitted when Montgomery Blair exploded on this point. "He really wanted him to fail. But there is no one in the army who can man these fortifications and lick these troops into shape half as well as he can."

"It's humiliating," he agreed with Welles, "in more ways than one. But we must use the tools we have. If he cannot fight himself, he excels in making others ready to fight."

"This will be a body blow at emancipation, if you really wish ever to have opportunity to issue your proclamation," sneered Chase.

"The people are gloomy," said Lincoln, wondering if Chase ever had missed an opportunity to insult him. He had achieved a consistency almost admirable in this! "The Democratic party is uglier in spirit and stronger than it's been since the war began. There's a sullen discontent abroad we dare not ignore. If recruiting is to go on, I dare not offend any large, organized group of people. By his declarations against my policies, McClellan has made himself the leader of the Democratic party. It is common sense to appease that party, at this moment."

A general groan met this statement. Lincoln felt his cheeks burn, but he said nothing, and the Cabinet having talked itself empty on the subject, turned to other matters.

It was Mary, curiously enough, who gave him the one shred of comfort he received. She rode in the carriage with him to the Soldiers' Home, that night. He told her about the Cabinet meeting and she said:

"There are two sides to it, I'll admit, much as I do deplore what you've done. When word of the reappointment reached the hospital, to-day, you'd have thought some one had poured a bottle of wine down the throat of every poor fellow there. They were cured of their wounds, the country was saved, 'God in his heaven, all right with the world!' "

The President pulled her hand within his arm and patted it. They rode in silence for a time then Mary said: "Lizzie Keckley came in this evening and told me the story. Miss Ford and her friends had gone bag and baggage when the detective policemen arrived. But they have some good clews. That's something."

"I hope she does go. It may save some dirty work when the proclamation comes out," said the President.

"Another thing to worry about!" groaned his wife.

And yet, in spite of all the bitterness of the reproaches heaped upon Lincoln and McClellan, before the week had past, they were forgotten. Between the 4th and 7th of September, General Lee crossed the Potomac, near Leesburg and entered Maryland. The public mind at once focussed on this new and terrible menace.

Within a few days, McClellan actually got his army of some 80,000 moving. He began, at once, asking for more men, but on the whole he appeared to be in a complacent frame of mind. He moved only at the rate of six miles a day.

In an agony of apprehension, the nation watched Lee's rapid, McClellan's leisurely, movements. Lee, certain that Maryland would welcome him, paused at Frederick for two days and sent Stonewall Jackson back to take Harper's Ferry. With his usual skill and impetuosity, Jackson accomplished this, and the ragged Confederates helped themselves to the clothing and food with which this Union fort was stored. But the people of Frederick were not hospitable to Lee, and while Jackson was in action at Harper's Ferry, Lee moved on westward to the vicinity of Sharpsburg. Still unhurried, McClellan followed. On the 16th, the two armies, Lee's with less than 40,000, McClellan with more than 87,000 men, drew up in battle line on either side of Antietam Creek, and before dawn of the 17th was begun the bloodiest single day's encounter of the Civil War.

At night it appeared to be a drawn battle, but the next morning, Lee began a retreat with his exhausted forces. He had lost 11,000 men.

Lincoln telegraphed, "Please do not let him get off without being hurt." McClellan's generals begged to be allowed to renew the attack, and drive Lee into the Potomac. But satisfied with having repulsed the invasion of the North, McClellan made camp in Antietam Valley. His losses totalled 13,000 soldiers.

For five days, Lincoln urged McClellan to pursue Lee, insisting that, as a student of war, McClellan must know that to make an actual military success of Antietam, he ought to follow the exhausted enemy. McClellan said that *his* army was exhausted. Lincoln asked if its exhaustion was greater than that of Lee's army. McClellan, hurt, replied by asking for reënforcements. Lincoln gave him every man that could be spared, until the General had 100,000 men with which to pursue the Rebels. On the 22nd the Army of the Potomac still was resting, and the newspapers of the country had begun to question the first wild joy which had called Antietam a glorious victory for the North.

That day, at noon, Lincoln called the Cabinet together. The sullen heat of summer was giving way to the fragrant, delicate air of autumn which is one of Washington's charming apologies for her dreadful climate. Lincoln was glad of this. The ghastly heat was trying to the nerves, and he had a vivid recollection of the physical oppression that had added to the irritability of the first discussion of the proclamation.

He deeply desired that his associates should meet his statements to-day with relaxed minds. For some minutes after the seven men had gathered round the table with him, he refused to be serious. When Secretary Bates asked him how large he believed the Rebel army to be, Lincoln replied, promptly:

"About 1,200,000!"

A gasp went round the table. The President explained. "You see when I ask my generals how great the Rebel forces are, they always guess them to be from three to five times greater than their own. So, at a minimum, if we have 400,000 soldiers, the Rebels must have three times that many."

Everybody but Stanton smiled. The Secretary of War was annoyed by the President's facetiousness. "Mr. Lincoln," he asked, severely, "I sent to you yesterday a delegation of fifty New York millionaires who wouldn't take my 'no' for an answer, though I roared it in their ears. They wished a gunboat stationed in New York harbor for its protection from Rebel rams. I suppose it's too much to hope that you backed my refusal!"

Lincoln chuckled. "They opened up on me wrong! They began by saying that they represented in their own right over $110,000,000. However, I listened with good attention and when they'd presented their plea I said, 'Gentlemen, it's impossible for me, in the present condition of things, to furnish you a gunboat. We are very short of them. The credit of the Government is at a very low ebb; greenbacks are worth not more than forty or fifty cents on the dollar. In this condition of things, if I were worth half of what you are, gentlemen, and were as badly frightened as you seem to be, I'd *build a* *gunboat and give it to the Government!'* I reckon I never saw $110,000,000 sink out of sight as quick as that did! They disappeared into thin air!"

He took a book from his pocket and put on his spectacles. "This morning, I received a copy from Artemus Ward of his new book. I wish I could write like that fellow! Just listen to this chapter. He calls it a High-handed Outrage at Utica."

Lincoln read with gusto and the Secretaries laughed as heartily as he, again with the exception of poor Stanton. But in spite of Stanton's bewildered annoyance, there was now an air of cheerful freedom about the Cabinet table that had been lacking for many weeks, and the President seized the moment.

"Gentlemen: I have, as you are aware, thought a great deal about the relation of this war to slavery and you all must remember that several weeks ago, I read to you an order I had prepared on this subject. I think the time has now come to act on that order. I wish it was a better time. I wish that we were in better condition. The action of the army against the Rebels has not been what I should have best liked. But they have been driven out of Maryland, and Pennsylvania is no longer in danger of invasion. When the Rebel army was at Frederick, I determined as soon as it should be driven out of Maryland, to issue a proclamation of emancipation. I said nothing to any one, but I made the promise to myself and—to my Maker.

"The Rebel army is now driven out, and I am going to fulfill that promise. I have got you together to hear what I have written down. I do not wish your advice about the main matter, for that I have determined for myself. This I say without intending anything but respect for any one of you. But I already know the views of each on this question. They have been heretofore expressed, and I have considered them as thoroughly and carefully as I can. What I have written is that which my reflections have determined me to say.

"If there is anything in the expressions I use or in any minor matter which any one of you think had better be changed, I shall be glad to receive the suggestions.

"One other observation I will make. I know that many others might, in this matter, as in others, do better than I can. And if I were satisfied that the public confidence was more surely possessed by any one of them than by me, and knew of any constitutional way he could be put in my place, he should have it. I would gladly yield it to him.

"But though I believe that I have not so much of the confidence of the people as I had some time since, I do not know that, all things considered, any person has more. And, however this may be, there is no way in which I can have any other man put where I am.

"I am here. I must do the best I can to bear the responsibility of taking the course which I think I ought to take."

He removed his spectacles, polished them with a red cotton handkerchief, replaced them, and read the manuscript that had become so essential a part of his being that he felt as though he were reading his very heart.

"I, Abraham Lincoln, President of the United States and Commander-in-Chief of the Army and Navy thereof, do hereby proclaim and declare that hereafter as heretofore, the war will be prosecuted for the object of practically restoring the constitutional relations between the United States and each of the States and the people thereof, in which State that relation is or may be suspended or disturbed.

"That it is my purpose, upon the next meeting of Congress, to again recommend the adoption of a practical measure, tendering pecuniary aid to the free acceptance or rejection of all the slave States, so called, the people whereof may not then be in rebellion against the United States, and which States may then have voluntarily adopted, or thereafter may voluntarily adopt, the immediate or gradual abolishment of slavery within their respective limits.

"That on the first day of January, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and sixty-three, all persons held as slaves within States, or designated parts of a State, the people thereof shall thus be in rebellion against the United States, shall be then, thenceforward and forever free. . . ."

He paused for a moment after pronouncing the last two words, thinking as he had thought every time he had written them that no two words in the human tongue ever had been charged with such portentousness, then he went on with the provisions for carrying out the postulates of the proclamation.

There was a silence after the reading was done, broken by a deep sigh that seemed to spring from the heart of every man in the room.

"The die is cast!" exclaimed Seward, with a little smile.

Lincoln nodded. "I can only trust in God I have made no mistake. It is now for the country and the world to pass judgment upon it."

"I'll give it to the newspapers this afternoon," said Seward, briskly. "The storm will break in about twenty-four hours."

And it did!

CHAPTER XXVII

BRADY

PERHAPS, as William Stoddard said, the waste paper baskets in the White House, for weeks following the publication of the emancipation proclamation, told best the story of its reception by the public. They could not be emptied rapidly enough to keep poor Stoddard's desk cleared of the thousands of letters and telegrams that poured upon it, daily.

For every word of praise from the Northern radicals, there were ten of censure from the Northern conservatives. The epithets of "unconstitutional tyrant" and "odious dictator" were the mildest applied to Lincoln. The proclamation was a "filthy ukase," a "vicious blow at the sacred liberty of white men," a "vile dead letter, stinking of poison." Lincoln was warned that the Union soldiers would fight no more; that "the Army will disband, rather than be sacrificed on the bloody altar of fanatical Abolition."

Lincoln, as he and his advisers had foreseen, had furnished the Democratic party with invaluable ammunition for its campaign in the fall elections of Governors and Congressmen, now pending. This was to be a source of acute anxiety to the President, for without the backing of Congress the proclamation would be of little worth.

The indignation of the South was volubly expressed in every form by which it was hoped Lincoln could be reached. The mysterious "Grape Vine Telegraph" system, as Lincoln called it, never worked more efficiently than it did in transferring from the South to the North, the wrath and threats of the Southern leaders.

Perhaps nothing more completely epitomized Southern feeling than a letter Stoddard brought to Lincoln about a week after the proclamation was issued.

"Here, sir, is a letter from Miss Ford. Do you care to see it, before I turn it over to Colonel Baker?"

"Jings!" grunted the President, holding out his hand.

The letter, written on Executive Mansion note paper, was undated, and without postmark.

"This is to warn you, Abraham Lincoln, as I have warned you repeatedly, that by this insane proclamation you have not only jeopardized your own life, but you have immensely strengthened the South, and so have wrecked the future of your Government. If the virulent hate you have roused in my soul is a criterion, as I know it to be, of the detestation for you in the heart of every other slaveholder, there is no possibility that you can live after January 1st."

Lincoln returned the letter to Stoddard, with a grunt.

"I'm no braver than any other man, Billy," he said, "but they have threatened me too much! You can get used to anything, even to living in fear of assassination. That's my state of mind. Send that letter to Baker, and say nothing about it to any one."

These things were not easy to bear. Yet there were many demonstrations of approval, from sources of great strength. A conference of Governors, gathered at Altoona to confer on the military situation, was in session at the time of the issuing of the proclamation. Seventeen of these men endorsed the President's act. Only the Governors of the four border States and of New Jersey refused to approve.

The churches, spheres of enormous influence, were unstinting in their enthusiasm. Perhaps the Baptist Convention of New York, as Lincoln said to his wife, "got the point" as well as any one in the world, when it wrote, that, though it saw with agony the slaughter on the battlefield, it could not regard "the sacrifice of life and treasure too much for the object to be procured. Human slavery is the procuring cause of the rebellion . . . the spirit of the age, the safety of the country, the laws of God require its entire removal."

Charles Sumner voiced the solemn joy of the radicals of the North, a day or so after the publication of the proclamation, when he sat at tea with Mary Lincoln. He spoke, of course, as the orator, but with that profound clarity and depth of perception characteristic of him.

"It is a great document. It hasn't, indeed, the sanction of States as a constitutional provision, or of Congress as a statute, or of a high tribunal as a rule of law. It could not, perhaps, be pleaded in any court as securing the liberty of a single slave. But in its significance and effect it stands before any edict, secular or ecclesiastical, since Constantine proclaimed Christianity as the religion of the Roman world."

Mary's cheeks flushed and her eyes kindled. "Yes! Yes!" she exclaimed, ardently. Then her face suddenly blanched. "But, Senator, I live in an agony of apprehension! Assassination!"

Sumner said nothing for a short time. They were sitting by the open window. Mary, in a white silk dress, looked like a Dresden shepherdess against the heavy crimson hangings. The Senator was somewhat haggard, but there was an expression of serenity in his blue eyes.

"Dear Mrs. Lincoln," he said, with a smile that had something of tragedy in it, "the Father of us all will not permit Abraham Lincoln to go until he has done his work!"

Mary set down the teapot to wring her hands. "But that's not enough!" she cried. "Not enough for me!— He plans now to go up to Antietam to see McClellan. If there is disaffection in the army toward Mr. Lincoln because of this proclamation, what can save him? I have pleaded and pleaded with him. But he is obdurate. The only compromise I could effect was to get him to promise to take Taddie with him. I believe that if his son is in his charge, he at least won't go into avoidable danger."

The Senator nodded, then asked anxiously, "You've not been able to influence him with regard to the General?"

"No, he really loves McClellan. I think he looks up to him as the sort of polished gentleman he'd like to be. And that, unconsciously, blinds him. Once he gets past the infatuation, he'll be ruthless."

Still anxiously, Sumner asked, "And you think he'll reach that point?"

Mary again picked up the teapot. She poured a cup and gave it to the Senator before she said, "Only if he is convinced that McClellan is disloyal to the military cause."

"But the fellow is more than disloyal," groaned Sumner. "He's incompetent as a general, and without sentiment for liberty. And, mark me, he's going to do more to block the workings of the proclamation than all other influences combined."

Mary said with sudden intuition, "I wonder where Miss Ford is. If only we could persuade her to come over to our side! They've lost all track of her, but they are convinced she never sailed for England. If once I could talk with her, I *know* I could shame her."

"I think," Sumner scowled, thoughtfully, "that there's more danger of the President being shot by her than by any one else,—all things considered."

"Oh, *don't* say that!" cried Mary. "I shan't sleep a wink to-night!"

"Why not, wife?" asked the President, coming into the room and shaking hands with Sumner.

"I never have got over that shooting scene, at the Soldiers' Home, Mr. Lincoln." Mary tried to smile as she looked up into his careworn face.

He patted her shoulder. "Perhaps they'll get to feel as I do about these fellows who get into trouble in the army. A man woke me up last night. His son was going to be shot at daylight for deserting. He wanted me to do something about it. I decided that shooting wouldn't do the boy any good, so I gave him a reprieve."

"I want you to have more than a reprieve." Mary's voice caught, childishly.

"And so I shall have, my dear! You'll laugh at all this, some day when we're sight-seeing in the Holy Land. I want to see Jacob's well, and Rachel's tomb. Well, Charles, what's the news of intervention?" seating himself on the couch and rubbing his head, which ached.

"It looks very bad, Mr. Lincoln. We can only wait patiently for the response to the proclamation."

The President took his cup of tea, unseeingly, and held it balanced in his great palm, while he eyed Sumner keenly. More and more did he appreciate the Senator's sagacity, where the English government was concerned.

"You believe that she will intervene, Charles?"

"England's permitting the Rebels to build ships in her shipyards with which to fight us," replied Sumner, slowly. "I assume, that unless the proclamation works a miracle, the coöperation between the so-called Confederacy and England will become an alliance. England will acknowledge the slave empire, and thus aid and abet the entrance of this monstrosity into the family of nations."

"The trouble with you is, Charles," protested Lincoln, "that you write only to the upper classes over there. The plain people are sound, in England, as they all are everywhere else. They'll prevent the government from acting either the fool or the villain."

"But it's not the plain people that govern 'England,'" exclaimed Mary.

"In the long run they do," Lincoln declared. "We'll hear from them on the proclamation. You'll see."

"I haven't told you of my intense joy in that document, sir," said the Senator. "I waited for it an eternity."

Lincoln nodded. "Of course, issuing the proclamation is only the beginning of the fight. I've got to have the solid backing of the North or the thing is only the Pope's Bull against the comet. If the army will back me, I can almost discount the inevitable increase of Democratic votes this November. If England will hold her hand until the true inwardness of it gets home to every one—well, I'll begin to sleep nights again."

"The army will back you if you can loose McClellan's strangle-hold on the country's freedom of thought," said Sumner. "I suppose the Cabinet is backing you, though Chase told of an ill-timed jest that Seward made, at the moment Lee was in Frederick. He said to Chase that some one had proposed that Lincoln halt the proposed invasions of Pennsylvania by Lee by a proclamation freeing all the apprentices of the State. If that is to be Seward's attitude, the New York Republicans aren't going to be of much service to us."

Lincoln set down the untasted cup of tea, and ran his hands through his hair. He, too, was very uncertain of Seward on this point, but he could see no use in admitting it.

"The Cabinet, at the last scratch, stood behind me splendidly," he said. "I couldn't be sure of counting on Antietam as a victory till Saturday, the 20th. It was too late for a Cabinet meeting, then, so Sunday I fixed it up a little, and Monday I let them have it.—Is Lord Lyons still abroad, Charles?"

"I believe so, sir."

"I must try him again. He's a hard nut to crack.—

We must not allow the newspapers to foster this idea of fighting England, Charles. One war at a time, say I!" He rose abruptly. "I'll be getting back to my shop. Here's John Hay to take my place. He's in fine whack."

John came in, languidly, but very elegant in a green suit and puce-colored waistcoat.

"I wish I could continue in as fine whack as the Tycoon does," he exclaimed in an exhausted voice, as the President disappeared. "He's running everything now,—except McClellan. I never knew with what tyrannous authority he rules the Cabinet till I saw him put the proclamation through." Then, as he took his tea from Mary, he said with sudden earnestness, "There's no man in the country so wise, so gentle, and so firm."

"Amen to that!" ejaculated Charles Sumner.

But the President, preparing for his trip to Antietam, was feeling anything but wise. The outcome of the battle of Antietam; McClellan's failure to follow up his advantage, had shaken him in his often expressed conviction that McClellan was no coward. For, he told himself, either it was cowardice that prevented the general from following and destroying Lee's stricken little army, or it was something so wicked that, for the moment, his mind refused to contemplate it.

If, he told himself, as he watched Mary packing up his great black valise, this trip convinced him that McClellan was *not* a coward, then he could have one more chance. Let him back the proclamation, openly and heartily, and he'd retain faith in him. But this, he promised himself, would be the final test.

The party that started for the battlefield was a mixed one. Lincoln was rather appalled when he saw the Chairman of the Committee on the Conduct of the War enter his car, just before the train started. It gave the trip an air of an official investigation. He did not wish McClellan to feel that he was being tried by a jury. He had planned to make only a personal and friendly visit. He decided to insist that the others, Senators and Representatives, fish their own pool, and leave his alone.

Tad was in great fettle. He had been forced by his mother to wear a blue velvet suit, with a wide, white, silk collar, and knit silk stockings of red and black in circular stripes. But by fussing persistently over the loathsome grandeur of his clothes, he had worn her down to permitting him to go "armed." He wore a bowie knife strapped round his waist under his coat, and an army pistol, as yet unloaded, was tucked under his arm, this last conceded because his mother banked on his unfailing facility for losing anything not buttoned or tied to him.

Sure enough, he left the pistol on the seat when his father got out of the train to take a look at Harper's Ferry, and George Nicolay, following, dropped it behind the water cooler.

Holding fast to Taddie's hand, Lincoln stood staring at the spot from which, a fortnight before, Stonewall Jackson had taken 12,000 Union soldiers. The tiny hamlet lay with such apparent unimportance in this beautiful gorge of the Blue Ridge mountains, where the Shenandoah and the Potomac meet! The loveliness of the place depressed him. He was superstitious about Harper's Ferry.

"I suppose it'll have to be captured three times," he said to Taddie, "before we'll be able to keep it."

"Are they any enemies hea' now?" demanded Tad.

"None except the place itself, Taddie," replied his father. "Come, Nicolay, let's get on toward Sharpsburg. How much farther is it?"

"Eighteen miles," replied the secretary. "Hill's Rebel division marched from here in seven hours."

"That's right!" exclaimed Lincoln. "He arrived at Antietam late in the afternoon, just in time to stop the

Federal advance on the left. Those Rebels can march McClellan to death! Jings! Wearing our uniforms, our shoes, shooting our very guns, from this very arsenal, they galloped up there and made a snoot at young Napoleon."

Nicolay grunted. "Young Napoleon never recognized it as such, sir, I'll wager."

"I don't suppose he did," agreed Lincoln, turning back to the train.

The major part of the short run to the little town of Sharpsburg was consumed by the search for Taddie's revolver. His father took part in it with great gusto, pressing the dignified Senator Blair into service as a detective, and insisting that each passenger in the private car lay out his "arsenal" for the little boy's anxious inspection. But Nicolay, who had learned, by some nineteen months of experience, Tad's remarkable ability for getting into trouble, kept his secret, and a large portion of the train boy's stock of oranges and lemon drops was able finally to reconcile the little fellow to the loss of half of his equipment!

Sharpsburg lay in a lovely valley between the Potomac to the west, and a spur of the Blue Ridge to the east. To the east of the village was Antietam Creek, a beautiful stream, running north and south through the valley. It was in this valley of meadows and woodlands that McClellan's great army lay recuperating.

There was a carriage at the railroad station, with a smart guard of cavalry to meet the President, and he was driven at once in a wild whirl of dust and a great uproar of trotting horsemen over the rough country roads to McClellan's headquarters.

The camp, as was usual with McClellan, was in the best possible position for the soldiers' comfort, and in the best possible order. The general and his staff welcomed Lincoln with all the dignity and formality that the occasion demanded. Formalities, as Lincoln confided to Tad, take a great deal of time and patience. It was late in the afternoon before Lincoln and McClellan finally sat down before the latter's tent, free to rest and to talk. Tad had long since disappeared with a pink-cheeked young corporal, a Harvard friend of Bob's.

McClellan was in an urbane mood, the mood of a man convinced that, for a second time, he had saved the nation. Lincoln was in no hurry to ruffle that mood. His visit was to be of several days' duration. There had been, he felt, too much tension in the relationship between himself and the young general. For once, he hoped, the contact could have some reality of casualness. So he sat in his camp chair, clasping his left knee, his eyes lifting from the map which lay on the table before him, to the valley, all shimmering gold in the October sun. The battle of Antietam was being explained to him.

"It was the extreme simplicity of my strategy which made the fighting so effective," said McClellan. "Lee held Sharpsburg, about the middle of the map, with the creek before him."

"And a good deal of high ground and woods with him, too," interjected Lincoln, his eyes sweeping up and down the meandering stream that paralleled the camp. "While you folks were down in the bottoms and sloughs Lee had the advantage of position."

"Yes," nodded McClellan, "but it availed him little."

"Your vast superiority of numbers took care of that," commented the President. "Well, get on with it, George, before it's too dusky for me to see the map. Your lines faced each other across the creek parallel for about three miles, eh?"

"Roughly, yes," replied McClellan. "But you are mistaken in regard to the Rebels' inferiority in numbers.

They had at least 100,000 men. We were both in position late on the afternoon of the 16th. There was some heavy skirmishing on our right before dark that day, but the actual battle opened at dawn the next morning. There was no ground for maneuvering. My plan simply was this: My right wing was to move forward first. When the battle was well engaged, my left wing was to move across the bridge, you can't see it from here, but it's indicated at the south end of the map,—and thrust back Lee's right until it had retreated through Sharpsburg. And, still speaking the layman's tongue, that's about what happened."

These broad details were, of course, perfectly familiar to Lincoln, who had spent agonized hours on the 17th, transferring the information in telegrams from the front, to his war map. He concealed his impatience.

"Burnside was to move your west wing across the bridge. He never got started until one o'clock. That gave Lee a chance to concentrate on you fellows up at the right. What was the trouble there, George?"

"Pardon me, sir. My order to move reached Burnside at ten o'clock in the morning. He sent Cox to take the bridge, at once, but it was not until we'd spent three hours and five hundred men that we took it. Then I ordered Burnside on up the hill behind the bridge to crowd the Rebels back and take Sharpsburg. He got as far as the Dunker church on the edge of the village when the Rebel, Hill, came up from Harper's Ferry and checked him."

"In the meantime," asked Lincoln, "what was happening in the center?"

"We were gaining ground," replied McClellan, complacently. "All along the line we gained. Nightfall found us here," pointing to the map. "The invasion of the North was ended."

"I see!" murmured Lincoln. "But—" Then he closed his lips firmly. He simply could not talk about that ghastly, that useless slaughter of men, that fruitless heroic endeavor of the magnificent army, without saying something that would irritate McClellan.

He was deeply relieved when a short, thin man with a pointed beard, wearing a dusty, much stained linen duster appeared, hesitating, a short distance from the tent.

"That fellow has a familiar face!" exclaimed Lincoln.

"Yes, that's Brady, the war photographer, a remarkable man," replied McClellan. "You've heard about what he's done? This will be the first war in history ever photographed."

"So that's Brady?" exclaimed Lincoln, rising. "I got Allan Pinkerton to give him the protection of the Secret Service, a year ago. Come over here, friend Brady!"

The little Irishman hurried forward, carefully set down a black case he was carrying, and shook hands with Lincoln.

"Well! Well! You're the wild fellow from Cork who almost got captured at the first Bull Run, and that Pinkerton's been wet-nursing on a dozen battlefields, since!" cried Lincoln. "Come, open up shop and show us your wares!"

"Just what I wished to be doing, Your Excellency!" grinned Brady. "With the General's permission, of course!"

"You know you're as popular with me as with my men, Brady," said McClellan. "We're proud to see the record you make of us. Get yourself a camp stool."

Brady obeyed with alacrity, lifted the case to the table, opened it and sat down. It was filled with photographs, from among which he drew an eight by ten plate.

"I thought Your Excellency would like to have my problem explained in a general way. My outfit consists of a butcher's wagon, with my living conveniences in the forward end, and a dark room, where no ray of light can enter, in the opposite end. Photographs are taken on glass plates, like this, which have been coated in the dark room with collodion. In it are dissolved bromide and iodide of potassium. Now, it's impossible to take pictures on these plates unless they've been freshly coated, within five minutes of the time the photograph is taken. The least breath of air or touch of heat or cold, or speck of dust on the plate while it's wet with collodion will spoil the picture. Perhaps this tells Your Excellency some of my difficulties in photographing a battle."

"Jings! I reckon it does!" exclaimed the President, keenly interested. "Let's see the plate," squinting at it, against the sky. "What's it of?"

"That's the beginning of the attack on the bridge, Burnside's bridge, the soldiers are calling it. Here's the print from that negative."

Lincoln put on his spectacles and gazed at the exquisite reproduction. A fine stone bridge of arches over a placid stream. A background of wooded heights. On the bridge a mass of soldiers, half hidden by smoke. In the foreground a dead soldier in profile, hugging his gun, his face upturned to the sky. For a long time the President stared at it.

"Five hundred like that boy," he said, at last, turning to McClellan.

The general's eyes filled with tears. "Don't ask me to look at it, sir. It wrings my heart."

"I know! You do love the men, as they love you," returned Lincoln, gently, his impatience wiped away as by magic. "Do something else if you want to, while Brady has his little show."

McClellan rose. "Thank you, sir," he said, gratefully. "I've a letter to write. There's just time before supper." He strode into his tent.

"He's too tender-hearted for the killing business," said Brady, offering the President another photograph.

"It accounts for a lot about him. When he rode over the battlefield on the 18th I saw him crying his heart out."

"Did you?" Lincoln spoke thoughtfully, and a sudden feeling of gratitude rose in him toward the little Irishman. Perhaps this did, indeed, explain away some of his uneasiness regarding the general.

"What's this?" he asked, after a moment.

"The Dunker church to the east of Sharpsburg. The Federals were driven back from there by Hill's men. Seems like a seventeen or eighteen mile walk just whetted the Rebels' appetite for fighting. Of those two men lying in the foreground, one is a Rebel, the other a Federal. You see, sir, the battle began up here," showing another picture. A rail fence with a row of bodies lying beside it,—"Federals—Hooker's men. He flung the first bunch there. When he was used up, Meade and Mansfield brought their men. There was nothing to it but sheer, persistent slaughter. At least, that's how it looked to a picture man. Why the divil didn't all the Federal line start fighting at once, instead of leaving Lee to run his men up and down the line where they were most needed? Looked to an ignorant picture man like there was no plan of concerted action."

"Let's see the next picture, Brady," said Lincoln.

"Well, here's a fine, convincing view of what happened in the center. This is a sunken road. The boys have named it Bloody Lane."

He gave the President the picture of a wide ditch filled with bodies in every contortion of agony, a gray, hideous mass. Lincoln could feel himself turning pale. But he stared steadily at the horror. If the "boys" could go into it, into this hell to which he'd sent them, he, at least, could gaze unflinching on the "counterfeit presentment." The little photographer gave him a keen glance and continued:

"You see, the Rebels had taken all the fight out of our men up at the right. And they were giving Burnside's boys more, entirely, than they could handle easily, on the left. But, in the middle, there were some Irish mixed among the other Federals, and the Rebels were getting what-for. They entrenched themselves in this sunken road. Our men got to the heights to right and left, and poured an enfilading fire into it. And there lie the Rebels, poor boys. Yes, sir, there they do lie!" Nodding his shaggy head.

Lincoln dropped the picture and stared off where,—a black gash in the sunset glow on a distant field,—lay the sunken road which McClellan previously had pointed out to him.

Brady pulled forth another photograph, saying, as if to himself, "Corps after corps, division after division into the red whirlpool of hell. Sure, sir," looking up, "one wouldn't grudge it to the divil who runs wars if the result was worth it. We could have pushed those fellows into the Potomac if—"

"Show me the picture in your hand, Brady, then I must go find Tad for his supper."

"Well, you've seen enough carnage. There's only one dead boy in this. It shows you a fine old plantation house the Rebels were burning as our boys came up."

Magnolias, with a two-galleried house in flames behind them. Sitting upright against one of the trunks—a dead Federal cavalryman, staring straight out of the picture, his horse, four legs turned in the air, beside him. Lincoln caught his breath. The sweat started to his forehead.

"I know that man, Brady! His name is Gordon. He's wanted by the detective police!"

"Is it so?" asked the photographer.

"But I reckon the God of Eternal Justice wanted him more," said Lincoln. "Leave me this picture, Brady.

No, don't leave it. Send it to Baker in Washington." He continued to hold the photograph in his hand, where the red sunset lighted it. Thoughts too deep for words surged through his mind. He returned the gaze of the dead eyes until they dimmed in the October dusk. Then he murmured: "Hail and farewell to 'Obscene' Gordon," and rose, repeating, "I must find Taddie."

For a great solitude had settled on his heart and he felt the need of his child's love and companionship.

CHAPTER XXVIII

TAD'S KITTEN

GEORGE NICOLAY accompanied Lincoln in his search for Tad. As the two walked along the neat Company streets of the camp, the President said, "George, I want to know this: Does McClellan, in his desire to save his men, actually accomplish the reverse? I'm scared to think of how many men he might now have alive in this camp, if he hadn't held them back when they should have been in. Or am I getting hipped on McClellan's weaknesses?"

"It's a difficult matter to work out, sir," replied Nicolay, chewing savagely on his cigar. "His men think he's infallible. Yet it's a fact that Lee out-generals him, right along. Superb fighters, those Southern leaders."

Lincoln nodded. "Quick on their feet. We have the slows."

"The men do feel that they could have shoved Lee's army into the Potomac if they'd been allowed to follow, next day." "They say they weren't as tired as Lee's men. Hadn't been worked so hard," Nicolay went on.

"There's Corporal Dick!" exclaimed the President. "Well, young man, where's my son?" pausing in the light of a camp fire.

"He started back for you, half an hour ago, Mr. President!" replied the soldier, his eyes a little perturbed.

"Hum! Like looking for a flea on a curly-haired dog!" Lincoln rubbed his chin. "I reckon the best thing to do is to go back and wait for him."

But supper in the officers' mess tent was over, and the

President was growing more and more uneasy, before the corporal came up a little breathlessly and saluted.

"I've located him, Mr. President. But he won't budge. He sits down by the bridge, crying. He says he wants you."

McClellan, Hooker, Burnside, sitting around the camp fire that flared outside the President's tent, looked up with amused smiles as Lincoln jumped to his feet.

"Wants his mother, I reckon! Corporal, you just lead me over there and see what I can do."

He strode, bareheaded, past half a hundred camp fires, moving so rapidly that he was gone before the soldiers could more than begin to cheer him. In the starlight, crouching against the stone parapet of the bridge, was Tad's little figure. The corporal fell back as soon as he had pointed the child out to Lincoln.

"Did you get homesick, all of a sudden, darling Taddie?" asked the President, stooping to pick up the boy.

"Don't touch me, Papa day," said the little boy in a voice hoarse from long sobbing. "I'm unda' my own a'west. I sent fo' you to tell you I have to stay hea' all night."

Lincoln sat down on the wall, his solitude yielding at once to the delight Tad's caprices always gave him.

"What bad thing have you done, Taddie?" he asked, solemnly.

"I—I—killed something I loved," suddenly beginning to cry again.

"Hush! Don't cry, or that'll make me cry, and everybody would say the President is a coward. Tell me all about it."

"The co'po'al gave me a little weeny, white kitten. It sang in my neck. I was taking it up to show you. Then I stopped hea' to play with it. It played so cunning, Papa day! Then—then—I played it was Jeff Davis and I was an Indian chief and I tied it to a stake and th'ew my bowie knife at it, like the juggla did, last winte'. I didn't want to hu't it. I wouldn't have fo' anything. But the di'ty skunk of a knife slipped and went into the kitten's little soft belly and all its insidings came out and it mewed and mewed and I couldn't stop it o' help it and it died. I knew you wouldn't punish me so I'm doing it myself."

Lincoln cleared his throat. "Where is the poor little kitten, darling Taddie?"

A little finger pointed in the starlight to a white spot against the gray wall.

"Let's make the wicked bowie knife dig a grave for the kitten. Then let's bury the knife in the same grave," suggested the President.

"No, we'll fling it in the c'eek. It can't lie beside the kitten," cried Taddie.

"Very well! I'll help you dig," agreed Lincoln.

The bowie knife did a neat job, and a few moments later was cast by Taddie, violently, from the bridge into the glimmering black water.

"Now," said his father, gravely, "I'll send the corporal back for my hat, for I promised your mother you'd sleep with me, and I'll have to camp right here, I reckon."

"Motha' wouldn't let you do that," exclaimed Tad. "Pe'haps, seeing it was mostly the bowie knife's fault, I can pa'ole myself to you' tent. And maybe you'd bette' caway me, I'm so sleepy."

"I reckon I had," agreed Lincoln.

He lifted the soft little body across his breast, and the horror of the hour with Brady lessened, as he carried Tad back past the cheering campfires to his tent.

He gave the days that followed to a personal investigation of the equipment which McClellan declared was inadequate, was preventing him from following Lee. It struck him as very curious that there was no discussion before him, by McClellan's officers, of the emancipation proclamation. He concluded that they were acting under orders from McClellan, and was willing to wait for the general to make the first move.

He mixed freely with the soldiers, joining them about their camp fires or sitting among them as they cleaned their accouterments, groomed their horses, or peeled potatoes for the perpetual stews. At first, they bothered him by cheering him every time he arrived among them, but as soon as they discovered that this was not what he wanted, they took him casually, and talked freely before him.

A great many of them were outspoken in their praise of the proclamation. Some of them shook their heads over it. The vast majority said, quite frankly, that they were waiting to learn what Little Mac thought of it. This depressed him more than he cared to admit, even to himself.

The day before he started back to Washington, McClellan held a grand review for him. There was considerable speculation, Nicolay told him, among the soldiers as to whether or not Old Abe could stick on a horse. And there was obvious interest, among officers as well as men, when a big black gelding, prancing and struggling to rear, was led up to the President's tent. Lincoln, laughing to himself, as he thought of his boyhood hours in the saddle, and of the miles he'd traveled on any sort of nag when, as a country lawyer, he'd "ridden the circuit," took the reins with an expressionless face.

Nicolay wrote Mary about it, that evening! "The officers, and even some of the men, have been a little patronizing to the President up here, taking their cue from the obvious source. It has made me furious. He hasn't seemed to observe it, but I'm sure it cut. You will be glad to learn that he made them smile out of the other side of their mouths, to-day. The moment he vaulted into the saddle, he obviously was at home. It was a very large horse and he looked splendid,—not an awkward line.

"I had a feeling that McClellan was not above making an endurance test of this. He came dashing up with his magnificent looking staff. Mr. Lincoln joined them at a gallop. The band struck up 'Hail to the Chief,' the artillery began to thunder, his horse walked on its hind legs. The President held his tall hat in one hand and received the salute, absolutely unperturbed. It was grand! Afterward came a long dash over very rough ground with ditches and fences to leap. The dear old Tycoon kept right up with McClellan. The soldiers missed none of the significance of it and when, a little later, he rode down the lines, the cheers almost rent the sky. . . . What a man!"

No one had enjoyed the review quite as much as the President. When he sat in McClellan's tent, that evening, with Burnside and Nicolay, he kept bursting into chuckles. McClellan scowled a little, but made no comment until Burnside and Nicolay left, then he asked Lincoln what in the situation amused him.

Lincoln shook his head. He had avoided, thus far, every topic that he thought could irritate McClellan. He had no intention of telling the General he was chuckling because it was McClellan himself who had changed the army's attitude of patronage to admiration. Instead, he paid a compliment.

"I must congratulate you, George, on the morale of your army. It's superb. I don't see how, with the men feeling as they do, anything can stop you now."

"Lack of shoes, for one thing," replied McClellan quickly. "I can't march my men barefoot."

"Lee marches his that way, unless he can shoe them from the enemy's stock!" exclaimed Lincoln. "Come, George, let's not start that old argument again! Quarter

Master General Meigs has sent me a full report of the supplies you've had up here. Your men say, themselves, they have everything they want."

"The men's judgment is final, of course," sneered McClellan. "Am I or am I not supposed to be the best judge of what the army needs?"

The old irritation overthrew all the President's resolves. He shoved aside the candle which stood on the table between them. "McClellan," he cried, "when are you going to start?"

"When my army is rested and equipped," replied the general, coolly.

Lincoln tossed his head impatiently. "McClellan, why don't you start to-morrow?"

McClellan did not reply.

The President breathed heavily for a moment, then the "granite look" appeared in his gray eyes.

"Brady was showing me more of his pictures yesterday. He has one set he calls, 'McClellan at the Front.' They're photographs of your different headquarters and of you, during your several battles. George, yours and Brady's ideas of where the Front is don't agree with mine. At your first Peninsula fight at Williamsburg, while Hooker and Kearny and Hancock were out with their men, under fire, you were on the wharf at Yorktown, doing assistant quartermaster's duty. At the battle of Fair Oaks, you were across the river from the fight, and the same at Beaver Dam Creek and Gaines' Mill. Wait a moment! You must hear me out, George, for this thought will poison my affection for you unless you clear it up."

McClellan, who had risen to leave the tent, halted, held by the command in Lincoln's voice. The President went on:

"During the retreat to the James, you were far ahead, locating the spots where Franklin and the rest were to fight their daily battle. At Malvern Hill, a sight that Halleck says a man with true soldier blood would have given his life to see, you were in your camp at Haxall's or down on the river, arranging for the retreat. And here at Antietam, when the sight of you, particularly at your left wing, would have put life into the movements of your men, you were back on the high ground near Pry's house, watching through spy glasses."

Lincoln had risen too. He was trembling with his determination somehow to win into McClellan's soul.

"George, this is an insulting imputation! It is not mine. It is that of the plain people who are carrying this war on their backs. One single move, and you will wipe that imputation from your fame, forever. Get on your horse, lead these boys after Lee, and, when you have found him, show them how to hurt him!"

"Have you finished?" asked McClellan, white to the lips.

"Not quite," replied Lincoln in a voice strident with anger. "I want to add that unless you indicate to me, very shortly, that you are starting at once after the enemy, I shall remove you permanently from the army."

Suddenly McClellan laughed. *"You!* Remove me! You'll have to move more rapidly than your wont, Lincoln! Come! Let's not part in anger! I don't believe you realize the insulting nature of half you've been saying!"

The two men exchanged a long look, then Lincoln, turning on his heel with an abrupt "Good night," left the tent.

CHAPTER XXIX

FERNANDO WOOD

LINCOLN returned to Washington, tanned of skin and clear of eye. It was nearing midnight when he strode into his wife's room, carrying Taddie. He deposited the sleeping child on the bed, and gathered Mary into his arms, kissing her several times. Then he held her from him and looked her over, approvingly. She was wearing a mantle-shaped boudoir gown of white, trimmed with rows of black beads. Her hair hung in a soft braid over either shoulder.

"Somehow, this is pleasanter than McClellan's tent!" he exclaimed. "Jings! I'm glad to have you again! What's the news here? Has Sumner heard from England on the proclamation?"

Mary led him to a chair and pushed him gently into it. Then she placed a bootjack at his feet.

"No business to-night, Abra'm. Take off those riding boots, while I fetch your slippers."

Lincoln sighed with relief as one boot after the other landed with a thud half way across the room.

"That's first rate!" he added as Mary pulled a carpet slipper over each gray wool sock. "Reckon I've been spoiled by you too long, wife, to make a contented soldier."

"How did Taddie behave?" asked Mary, as he put out a great hand to draw her toward him.

"Like an angel," replied his father, promptly.

"Tell me some of the things you both did," perching on the arm of his chair, and leaning against him.

"Well, let's see! The kitten episode was his best achievement, I reckon. I was looking at Brady's photographs. You must see those, Mary. They're wonderful." He described the pictures to her, then told her of Tad and the white kitten.

"The blessed lamb!" murmured Mary.

Lincoln nodded. "I can't explain why the incident meant so much to me. You see, actually being on the battlefield, observing the devastation, seeing Brady's pictures—it smelled so of death—death of my making, Mary." He paused and Mary felt his body quiver with a suppressed sob.

She kissed him. "I know, Abra'm! I know!"

He sat fighting for self-control. He had come back determined that only ruthless decisiveness should govern him until the proclamation was an accepted fact in the country. This, he told himself, was a poor beginning. He cleared his throat and managed to say, casually:

"By the way, one of Brady's photographs showed me 'Obscene' Gordon, as a dead cavalryman."

Mary jumped from her place and stared at him incredulously. Then she laughed, clapped her hands, sobbed and threw herself against him, caressing him wildly. He held her until she was serene again.

"I know," she said, at last, "that it's wicked to feel so about the death of any human being. But half my anxiety about you is lifted. I must tell Mr. and Mrs. Welles, to-morrow, the first thing."

"I ought to go over to the telegraph office and see what Buell is doing in Kentucky." The President looked at his watch. "Folks out West are getting to feel about Buell as the folks here do about McClellan. They both have the slows, that's a fact. I'm going to remove Buell if he doesn't show more desire to pursue the enemy than he has up to date. I won't be gone long," taking up the little gray shawl and the high hat.

Mary followed him to the door. "Now that I know Gordon isn't hiding in a corridor I can let you go. I wonder if Miss Ford knows of his death."

"Lizzie Keckley's friend, Anna, wasn't it, who went as lady's maid,—reports nothing, I suppose?"

"She can neither read nor write," replied Mary and closing the door after her husband, she turned to attend to the sleeping boy.

As a matter of fact, Gordon's fate was of little moment to Miss Ford. She was engrossed in the work that was engrossing every Southern slaveholder,—that of organizing the final fight against emancipation. There had been some thought of sending her to England to see what she could do to hasten the moment of intervention. But the crisis precipitated by the issuing of the proclamation had caused Davis to abandon the idea.

On an evening, shortly before the fall elections took place, several gentlemen met in the parlor of the little house she was occupying on Bleecker Street in New York City. Her disguise was extremely clever. Nothing, of course, could conceal her great height. But she had dyed her hair black, and wore it wrapped in severe bands about her head. She had stained her blond skin to a decided olive tint. She wore, instead of her perpetual green, mourning of a pronounced type.

Captain Taylor, dressed as a policeman, gained admission to the house a few minutes earlier than the other visitors, by seeming to force the lock on the door. The Virginian bolted it after him, and led the way into the rear room where a coal fire burned cheerfully.

"I reckon that's the approved way for a policeman to enter a house of ill fame!" said Taylor. "Unfortunately, the street is so dark that no one observed my histrionics!"

"Don't be too sure, Tom!" exclaimed Miss Ford. "I may be more closely watched than we suspect."

"Did you have trouble getting this place?" asked Taylor, warming his back before the fire.

"None! Mayor Wood had the place raided, one day, and the next day Anna and I moved in."

"Where's Uncle Bob?" asked the Captain.

"He ran away before we left Washington, the devilish old fool!" She spoke with acid bitterness.

Taylor shook his head in sympathy. "Mother writes that not one of ours is left. When news of the proclamation came even Mammy Sophie legged it off to the Union lines. Lady, I wouldn't know you in that make-up if I saw you in your own home.—I loathe your disguise,—and I loathe the type and character you are simulating."

The Virginian shrugged her shoulders and said, "There is some one, now!" rising as voices were heard in the hall, and a man wearing an evening cloak of black broadcloth entered. It was Fernando Wood, Mayor of New York.

The three greeted one another as old friends, and settled before the fire. "Seymour will be along later," said Mayor Wood. He was a good-looking man of middle age, with thick dark hair, fine gray eyes and humorous mouth. He was smooth shaven, and wore a high stock of black satin which added to his look of distinction. "He's very busy and if he doesn't get here, is willing for me to represent him. I prophesy a glorious victory at the polls, on Tuesday. Even Illinois will take a few bites from Abraham's hide. And Governor Seymour has New York State in his pocket."

"You have the emancipation proclamation to thank for all that," said Miss Ford.

"Exactly," agreed Wood. "It is also to be thanked for the fact that enlistments for the past two weeks have been practically nil. Lincoln will have to try the draft, next. Then there'll be revolution in the North."

"Are these your ideas or Mr. Seymour's, Mayor Wood?" asked Captain Taylor.

Wood laughed. "Seymour never had as mild a thought as that about Lincoln! He *says* that the preservation of the Union comes first with him, but I believe he'd turn Secessionist if thereby he could harm the Administration. He'd be better off if he'd calmly admit his sympathy with the Secessionists."

"You don't admit that, as I understand you, Mayor Wood," said Miss Ford, smiling, "except in certain select circles!"

"One has to be careful," admitted Wood. "But I shall never be as discreet as McClellan. I had to declare flat-footed that emancipation was a bitter wrong to the soldiers who were fighting only to save the Union. McClellan issued a statement last week in which he never mentioned the proclamation, or said a word against it. Yet he gave the soldiers as clearly to understand that he disapproved of it as though he'd denounced it in so many words. But, by his subtlety, he's got old Abe all calmed down, they tell me."

"Don't be so sure of that!" exclaimed Miss Ford. "He's a keen man, Abraham Lincoln. Where the weakness of the plans made by Davis and your group, Mr. Mayor, lies, is that you still refuse to recognize him as being more astute than any of you."

"Let's get on with the evening's business," urged Taylor, impatiently. He sat with his elbows on his knees, pulling at his handkerchief.

"Lincoln is our business, more than anything else," retorted the Virginian. "Davis insists that my main task is to keep Lincoln's character always before all of you. But you insist on treating Lincoln as a Simple Susan. Davis is worse than you are, Tom, and Seymour is a hopeless fanatic in his hatred of the President."

Taylor sat up with a jerk. He had aged ten years in the last ten months. His nerves were uncertain.

"If I'm not to get Wood's report, I might as well go on out to Ohio."

"My report is easy to give, Captain. I have the letter from McClellan," said the Mayor.

"Where is it?" asked Taylor, quickly.

"In a safe place. You shall have it the moment you produce one from Davis, making me Secretary of State in McClellan's Cabinet." Wood's good-looking face was as serene as Captain Taylor's was agitated.

"I have that, also, in a safe place," said the Captain. "What does McClellan say in the letter?"

"Just what your crowd asked for. That he accepts the Democratic nomination for President, that he will carry on the war in a manner to conciliate the South, that he will leave slavery alone."

"Fine!" ejaculated Taylor. "What is the state of affairs between him and Lincoln?"

"Oh, quite as usual," smiled Wood. "Abe pleading with him tearfully to destroy Lee before he can get back to Richmond, and McClellan moving the Army of the Potomac as though he had on hand 100,000 invalids, pausing ever and anon to ask for reënforcements or supplies. He was pleading for horses when I was there. And Jeb Stuart rode completely round his camp! I have my hat off to you Southerners."

"Lincoln's patience is not inexhaustible," said Miss Ford, "and McClellan's ego makes him indiscreet. What do we do if Lincoln actually removes McClellan?"

"He'll never do that!" protested the Mayor. "He's afraid of McClellan's influence with the soldiers. He proved that when he re-instated him, last summer."

"How long are you counting on Lincoln's patience enduring?" insisted the Virginian.

"Until January 1st, when he tries to put in force the threat which he wrote into the proclamation," replied Taylor. "McClellan's letter will then be made public and Lincoln will have either to dismiss him or abdicate, himself. Popular outcry and pressure from England and France will not allow him to throw McClellan out. So Lincoln will abdicate. I'm told he's really only too anxious to do so."

"But if Lincoln loses patience before then?" urged Miss Ford. "You know there's nothing more absurd than the general belief that Lincoln is incapable of losing his temper. I've seen him in a state of terrible indignation."

"I can answer that question," said Wood. "If Lincoln dismisses him, McClellan will march to Washington at the head of his army. So three different officers, very close to him, told me. And the moment he becomes dictator, the war will end.—What am I to do next, Captain?"

"You are to go down to see Lincoln and discover the state of his mind toward McClellan and toward the draft. Urge the draft on him. Nothing can help the peace party more right now than the draft idea." Taylor rose to go.

At the same moment, Anna admitted two more callers. Both were men in evening dress. Miss Ford and Mayor Wood rose.

"Good evening, Mr. Seymour!" exclaimed the Virginian, "and good evening, Lord Lyons! I heard that your packet was in."

The two gentlemen bowed over Miss Ford's hand, and greeted Wood and Taylor.

"I hope that you have recovered from your ill health, my Lord," said Wood, as the group remade itself before the fire.

"Ah! Quite so! Quite so! Thank you, Mayor

Wood," replied the Englishman, with his usual urbanity of manner.

"And does England still plan to intervene?" cried the Virginian.

Lyons turned on her dark eyes, keen beneath their drooping lids, and stroked his sideburns. "I did not know, my dear Miss Ford, that my government planned intervention."

"Gladstone intimated as much," said Seymour, quickly.

"But Mr. Gladstone is not Her Majesty's Government," replied the Minister. "Her Majesty's Government have declared their neutrality, and is doing their utmost to abide by that declaration."

"Except that they permit the South to build its ships in English shipyards and—" began the Virginian, smiling.

"Come! Come! Miss Ford, you must not embarrass our distinguished guest," protested Seymour. "I invited him here that he might hear from Captain Taylor the latest hopes of the Southern peace party. I beg of you, ask Lord Lyons no more questions."

"I deserve the reprimand, sir!" The Virginian tossed her handsome head, however, as she spoke.

Lord Lyons gave her a friendly smile and turned toward Taylor. There followed a half hour during which the captain, with considerable help from the others, gave to the British Minister a fairly complete picture of the progress made by the peace parties, North and South, during the Minister's three months in England. It was a glowing report, and at its end Taylor asked Lord Lyons if he did not think that the strength of the movement would justify England in intervening, should the northern pro-slavery, known as the peace party, come into power under McClellan. The British Minister refused to give an opinion, yet as he rose to go, the impression that he left was that he was in sympathy with the South, that he looked on victory for the North as impossible, that the Administration at Washington would, after a moment of bluster, give in if they could be convinced that their opponents were sufficiently in earnest.

"And yet," said Miss Ford, commenting on this impression, after he had gone, "he was as clever as McClellan with the proclamation. He never said a word that could be quoted."

Seymour, pacing with dignified step up and down the little parlor, nodded his head. "He is a clever diplomat. Now, my friends, the moment has come, I think, when we may believe the end is at hand. When I am elected, the tyranny of that murderer in the White House will end, in New York State, at least! I have a curious feeling of elation."

"I wonder!" murmured Miss Ford. "I wonder! I've learned to fear Lincoln. I think, unless President Davis gives me other orders, I'll go back to Washington, where I can watch him. You remember, Tom, you warned me that bullets, carefully distributed, might be the last and best remedy."

"And I remember how horrified you were at the thought," returned Taylor, dryly.

"Humph! I hadn't been tortured enough, then," said the Virginian.

Taylor gave her a look that was tinged with deep concern, then he turned to continue his bargaining with Fernando Wood.

CHAPTER XXX

THE BACKWOODS JUPITER

IT was the evening following the one on which Miss Ford entertained her distinguished guests that Miss Clara Barton sent in her card to Mrs. Lincoln at the White House. Mary was making an heroic endeavor to revive the social activities of the Executive Mansion for the winter, and was working, with William Stoddard and John Hay, on a list of invitations for a "reception with refreshments."

She greeted Miss Barton cordially, then begged her to rest before the fire for a few moments, while she and the two secretaries completed their task.

"Mrs. Lincoln," said Stoddard, completing the protest begun before Miss Barton came in, "you can't pack all the people on this list into LaFayette Square, let alone the reception rooms of the White House."

"If I don't, Mr. Lincoln will be vilified as a snob!" cried Mary.

John Hay laughed. "I think the Tycoon would like that! It's the only thing in the dictionary he hasn't been called. And really, Madam President, this is not a public reception, as your list would indicate. By the way, you mustn't issue personal invitations to reporters. One invitation to each *newspaper!* There's a difference."

Madam President threw up her hands. "But, John and Billy, Mr. Lincoln has promised invitations to half a dozen reporters who've asked for them!"

"It really can't be done!" declared Stoddard, wearily. "Even the members of the Cabinet are invited only by virtue of their office. I'll keep the reporters away from you, Mrs. Lincoln. Better let me manage."

"You can't keep the reporters' tongues and pens from me, though." Mary shook her head ruefully. "However, go ahead, Billy! They can't hate me more than they already do!" She turned to Miss Barton, and the two young men went out.

"You ought to let the newspapers know of your wonderful daily work in the hospitals, Mrs. Lincoln," suggested Miss Barton with a smile.

Mary returned the smile. The two had become fast friends. They talked at some length over a hospital that was being set up in a church at Fairfax Court House, then Miss Barton made known the real purpose of her call. General McClellan was pleading for new hospital tents.

"There is another ghastly battle pending, and while the Quartermaster-General insists that McClellan already is oversupplied with hospital tents, and is not sending any, I have the conviction that the Army of the Potomac can't be too well equipped in that line. I can lay hands on tents for five thousand men if you arrange to have them put into McClellan's hands, without offending the Quartermaster-General," said Miss Barton.

Mary pursed her lips, thoughtfully. "Secretary Stanton certainly won't help. He's too angry with McClellan. Halleck is angry, but he does what Mr. Lincoln tells him to do. I suppose, with your usual astuteness, you've discovered that and wish me to overpersuade the President!"

"You can do so, can't you?" smiled Miss Barton.

"Not always, by any means," replied Mary.

The two women sat regarding each other, thoughtfully; Miss Barton in a meager, black merino, with white collar and cuffs, with the smallest possible crinoline, the President's wife in a rich black silk, pleated and ruffled in a hundred pleats and folds over a hoopskirt that dwarfed in diameter the huge center table. Yet, in their earnestness, in the quiet fortitude in their eyes, they were curiously alike.

"I'll try, dear Miss Barton," said Mary finally. "If I can't win the concession, perhaps Taddie can. You think the tents really will be needed?"

Miss Barton, rising, threw up both her hands. "Can you ask that, after all you've observed in the hospitals here?"

Mary sighed. "I know! And I want to help. Yet I cannot bear to add one dust speck of weight to Mr. Lincoln's burden."

"We are all suffering," said Miss Barton, gently, "but none so much as the common soldiers."

"Don't go!" urged Mary. "I'm expecting Mr. Lincoln any moment. He's having a war council and is two hours late for supper."

"Thank you, Madam President, but I'm leaving to-morrow to join the army. I learned to-day that it has finally crossed the Potomac and is moving down the eastern side of the Blue Ridge. With Lee moving south along the western side, there's bound to be constant clashes. I shall be needed."

Mary sighed. "How I envy you! Miss Barton, may I not ride a few miles with you to-morrow? They say it's such a superb sight, and dramatic, too, that road packed with transports and marching soldiers, all the way between Washington and Army Headquarters."

"Indeed you may! Though—" a mischievous look in her eyes—"I'm afraid the President won't forgive me."

"He'd forgive you anything!" exclaimed Mary. "What time do you leave your house?"

"At ten o'clock," replied Miss Barton.

"I'll be there," declared Mary, accompanying Miss Barton to the door.

She remained standing there after the visitor's departure, looking anxiously toward the stairhead. It was nine o'clock. Tad was with his father, and ought to be in bed. She was debating with herself whether or not to go over to Stanton's office, when Lincoln, Tad on his shoulders, appeared on the stairs. As if by magic, John Hay materialized from the secretaries' room, Seward and Sumner from the President's office. They converged toward the door into the sitting room.

"Please, please!" cried Mary, "allow Mr. Lincoln to eat his supper first! He's had nothing since noon. All of you come in here, while Tad takes his father to the dining room."

There was half laughing, half impatient agreement on the part of Lincoln, while the others followed Mrs. Lincoln meekly into the sitting room.

"You must not think of me only as a petty tyrant," said Mary, a little sadly, as she seated herself. "Mr. Lincoln looks so old and weary that it frightens me!"

"We think of you as an important part of the President's brains and backbone," retorted Seward.

"For that, you may smoke, sir!" exclaimed Mary. "I told Mrs. Seward the other day that you ought to be taking an iron tonic. You are overworking yourself, Governor."

"Who isn't?" demanded Seward. "I wouldn't be surprised any day to discover a gray hair in John Hay's cherished mustache."

John groaned. "What are gray hairs to me? I'm preoccupied with more serious matters! The price of clothing for example! I can't afford so much as a new waistcoat."

"It's very sad," agreed Seward, puffing vigorously at his cigar and looking up at Sumner, who stood with an elbow on the mantelpiece. "Senator, if I knew as much about the art of dressing as you, Lincoln would never have had a chance at the Presidency."

Sumner glanced down, unsmilingly, at his blue broadcloth trousers. "I see," he said, absent-mindedly. Then, as the others laughed, he added, apologetically, "I was thinking about a favor I must ask of the President. One of my constituents, most important to the proclamation, wants his son to be made a brigadier-general."

"You have no chance whatever, Senator!" exclaimed Seward, briskly. Then he added, with a great laugh, "I know whereof I speak! This morning I urged that very promotion for a constituent of mine, and the President reduced me to pulp."

"What is there humorous about that?" asked Sumner.

"Well, Lincoln told me a story, prefacing it with the remark that we already had more generals than we knew what to do with. 'Look here, Seward,' he said, 'suppose you had a large cattleyard, full of all sorts of cattle—cows, oxen, bulls—and you kept killing, selling and disposing of your cows and oxen in one way and another, taking good care of your bulls. By and by you'd find that you had nothing but a yardful of old bulls, good for nothing under heaven. Now it will be just that way with the army if I don't stop making brigadier-generals!' "

John Hay shouted. Sumner smiled, a little uncomfortably. And in the midst of it Lincoln came in carrying a pitcher of milk and a glass, while Tad followed with a plate of bread.

"Taddie and I decided we didn't like the supper, and we didn't like the dining room," he said, "so we raided the kitchen and here we are," seating himself at the table, while Mary and John Hay jumped to clear a place for him. Taddie, with a glance at the clock, and another at his mother, retired discreetly to a stool behind his father's chair.

"What's the news from England, Sumner?" asked the President.

"A letter from Adams, to-day," said Seward, "says that Gladstone wants the Government to intervene at once. He denounces the proclamation in the most cynical and captious manner."

"I understand the President to be speaking to me, sir." Sumner gave the imperturbable Seward a severe glance. "Cobden is delighted with the proclamation, so is John Bright."

"Yes! Yes!" Lincoln spoke impatiently. "But what of the Government? What of Lord Russell?"

"He is supercilious,—ready to do anything that will make a nation of the South," replied Sumner.

"The same old story!" murmured the President, thrusting aside his scarcely tasted meal, and staring broodingly into the fire. No one intruded on his silence. He thought of William Russell's failure to accomplish what he had asked of him, he thought of Thurlow Weed's last report from France, that only a miracle could keep the Emperor's hand from intervening. When would the common people of England speak? When!

"McClellan is at Rectortown," he said, aloud. "Lee is coming through the Blue Ridge below him, heading for Culpeper, I reckon."

"He's going to get there before McClellan does, too!" exclaimed John Hay. "I wish Grant had his hands on the Army of the Potomac."

"Grant's needed where he is, as I told the Cabinet this morning," replied the President. "You weren't there, Seward. I read them a poem I'd like you to hear,—by that fellow, Edmund Clarence Stedman. The Cabinet was wondering how the Republican North would take it, if the Lord or some other hand removed McClellan. This answers part of the question:

"Back from the trebly crimsoned field
Terrible words are thunder-tost!
Full of wrath that will not yield,
Full of revenge for battles lost!
Hark to their echo, as it cross't
The Capitol, making faces wan!
End the murderous holocaust!
Abraham Lincoln, give us a *man!*

Give us a man of God's own mould,
Born to marshal his fellow men;
One whose fame is not bought and sold
At the stroke of a politician's pen;
Give us the man of thousands ten
Fit to do as well as to plan.
Give us a rallying cry, and then,
Abraham Lincoln, find us a man! . . ."

He read through the several remaining verses, then replaced the clipping in his pocket. "Yes, a *man!*" he repeated. "But where?"

"John Hay would be a good gene'al," exclaimed Taddie, unexpectedly. "He's bossy enough, that I know!"

Lincoln gave a sudden shout of laughter and reaching behind his chair, pulled the little boy round to sit on his knee.

Mary seized the moment. "Clara Barton ought to be a general, at the very least. Do you men know that she was with the army, every minute, at the battle of Antietam, that men were shot in her arms, that she brought them bandages, candles, ether, wine, when and where they had nothing? Why, that woman soothed and bandaged Burnside's men as they dropped beside the bridge! She was here, to-night. She fears another engagement. She says McClellan wants more hospital tents and Quartermaster Meigs says 'no!' She has tents for five thousand men in her warehouse. Will you make Meigs send them?"

"No," replied the President, quietly. "I will not."

"Not for the sick, wounded men, Papa day?" pleaded Taddie, turning his sleep heavy blue eyes up to his father.

"The men have had everything sent to them that mules and roads can carry!" exclaimed Lincoln. "Clara Barton is a noble woman, but I'd make her General-in-Chief sooner than I'd truckle to another of McClellan's excuses."

"But these are for the men, Mr. Lincoln," cried Mary. "If you could hear the story of their sufferings as I hear them, day after day,—always retreating,—always defeated—nothing to pay for their horrible sufferings—"

Taddie began to cry. "Papa day, please, please—"

Lincoln set the little boy to his feet. "No!" he said, in a voice the child seldom heard. "Go to bed, at once. This I cannot and will not bear."

Taddie, after one glance at his father's face, rushed from the room, colliding at the door with Lord Lyons. The Minister smiled down at him, then crossed the room to bow over Mary Lincoln's hand. The President greeted him with an entire lack of his usual jocularity. The diplomat was equally grave.

"I was requested to deliver a message to Mr. Seward, the moment of my arrival in Washington," he said. "I have only just come from the train."

"We'll step into the President's office, Lord Lyons." Seward spoke with alacrity.

"One moment," interposed Lincoln. "The message would, I presume, interest me, as the head of this Government?"

"Certainly, Your Excellency," replied the Minister.

"Then supposing you deliver it right here." Lincoln folded his arms and leaned against the mantel, opposite Sumner.

Lord Lyons raised his black brows but bowed, courteously. "Lord Russell wishes me to procure your Government's opinion on the following hypothetical query: Has not the time come for offering mediation to the United States Government, with a view to stopping the useless carnage of this fanatical war?"

Seward cleared his throat excitedly, but Lincoln shook his head at the Secretary. He spoke slowly and thoughtfully.

"Say this to your Government, Lord Lyons: Tell them they will find our opinion if they'll inquire among the cotton operators of England, the people whom the war is starving."

"And what am I to understand by that, Your Excellency?" ejaculated the Englishman.

"You're to understand, sir," replied Lincoln, returning the Englishman's look, keenly, "that a government that does not listen to the voice of the plain people is deaf to its own best interests."

Lord Lyons permitted himself to smile. "That is your theory of successful governing, Your Excellency?"

"It is, sir. Also, I'd urge your common sense to realize that this is a family quarrel. Human nature is such that when the well-intentioned outsider interferes in that kind of a fight, he's apt to find himself embroiled in the mix-up."

"I'm not so sure that England is well-intentioned," said Seward, abruptly. "I'm told that the powers higher up, over there, rejoice every time the North loses a battle. The neutrality is only skin-deep."

Lincoln tossed his head, impatiently. Seward's liking for an argument always annoyed him, but particularly did it annoy him to-night. Sumner started to reply but the President interrupted:

"What I can't seem to impress on you folks is that

Lord Russell is no fool, and, whatever his personal feeling is, he's not going to lead his country into a war unpopular with the people."

Seward spoke quickly but with a smile. "If Lord Lyons has been privy to the feeling of New York State he must feel that you, yourself, are heading an unpopular war, Mr. Lincoln."

Lincoln returned the smile. "I'm attorney for the people, and I'm not going to let my client manage the case against my judgment."

The Englishman bowed to the President. "I apprehend that my hypothetical query has been fully answered."

"I aimed to do just that, Lord Lyons," replied Lincoln. "Charles,"—turning to Sumner,—"you go along with Lyons and show him your last letter from the Duchess of Argyle. It might be an eye-opener to him."

"I'd like to hear that too, if I may," Seward said. He bade Mary good night and followed the others from the room.

Mary remarked that Taddie must not take both dogs to bed with him, and hurried out, leaving John Hay and Lincoln alone. The President returned to his neglected supper. He drank two glasses of milk and finished the plate of bread, while John Hay stood silent before the fire. The two were completely companionable.

"John," said Lincoln, suddenly, "do you recall a sort of threat or promise I made myself in your presence, when I got back from my visit to Antietam?"

"Yes, sir! You said that if McClellan should permit Lee to cross the Blue Ridge and place himself between Richmond and the Army of the Potomac, you would remove him from command."

"And now"—Lincoln rose and took a noiseless stride or two up and down the room—"now Lee has crossed the Blue Ridge and is installed at Culpeper Court

House, and McClellan is still thirty miles north of him. John," in a voice indescribably mournful, "I've lost my faith in him!" Then, "Come into my room a moment."

Young Hay followed eagerly. Lincoln turned up the light, and strode over to his bedside table, where his Bible lay, with a letter on the open pages. "I was reading this book most of last night, when I wasn't measuring off the distance between my bed and the grate. John, when I get to thinking of the chance George McClellan has thrown away to be the most valuable man, the best-loved man in this country, I could sit down and cry like a girl that's lost her first lover. He should, and could, have been everything to us. Here! Isaiah said it. 'And a man shall be as an hiding place from the wind and a covert from the tempest; as rivers of water in a dry place; as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land—As the shadow of a great rock in a weary land'—but he has chosen otherwise. Here, read what I birthed of my last night's travail."

John took the letter and, with growing pallor, read:

"By direction of the President, it is ordered that Major-General McClellan be relieved from the command of the Army of the Potomac, and that Major-General Burnside take command of that Army. Also, that Major-General Hunter take command of the corps in said Army which is now commanded by General Burnside.

"That Major-General Fitz-John Porter be relieved from the corps he now commands in said army, and that Major-General Hooker take command of said corps.

"The General-in-Chief is authorized, in his discretion, to issue the order substantially as above, forthwith, or as soon as he may deem proper. A. Lincoln."

John looked up from the letter. "Hurray! Three huzza's and a tiger! The backwoods Jupiter is wielding the bolts of war at last!"

"Shall you still cheer if McClellan leads the army down here and takes my job over?" asked the President, refreshed, as he always was by John's volatility.

"He'll never even try, the coward!" exclaimed young Hay.

"He's drunk with vanity and ambition, and a drunken man is a dangerous man," declared Lincoln. "It's more than likely he'll take a long shot at the White House! John, I'm going to take that order to Stanton, now."

"Want me to go with you, sir?" with a little grin as of understanding.

Lincoln returned the grin. "I reckon I do. He'll still be in his office, awaiting news from Grant."

"Better not venture out until I go into the reception room and engage the attention of the crowd. In two minutes, sir, you hustle down the staircase and I'll join you at the front door."

The little strategy was carried through. "Anybody there I ought to see?" asked the President, as, somewhat breathless, John shot past old Daniel into the shadowy portico.

"No one there, at all, sir, except Fernando Wood. I turned him over to Nicolay."

"I refuse to see Wood again. I don't trust him," said the President, then lapsed into silence, his thoughts on McClellan.

Stanton was standing before his tall desk, signing letters, as the President and his secretary came in.

"Quartermaster-General Meigs proves another lie on McClellan," he rasped, abruptly. "McClellan says he's been waiting for horses, that he's received only 150 horses a week since the first of September. As a matter of fact he's been receiving an average of 1,459 horses a week. I'm ready to court-martial that fellow."

"Is Halleck anywhere 'round?" asked Lincoln.

Stanton glanced at his watch. "He's due here, right now, to get Meigs' report. And here he comes," as Halleck, looking at least ten years older than his forty-seven years, came slowly into the room.

"Come along to the funeral, Halleck!" Lincoln took the soldier's arm, affectionately. "You look all set for it."

The General-in-Chief looked up at the President, his large, fine eyes sunk in his head, as though by a wasting illness. "McClellan has worn me out, Mr. Lincoln."

"We'll fix that up, right now!" Lincoln pushed Halleck into a chair. "Come, Stanton, get off your feet for a while." He shoved Stanton to the sofa beside John Hay, and wrapped his own long legs round the desk stool. Then he read aloud the order dismissing McClellan.

As he pronounced the last word, Stanton jumped to his feet with a roar. "A month late! Six months late!"

Lincoln looked over his spectacles at the Secretary of War. "Do you mean you wouldn't fire him?"

Halleck bit his nails. "Either McClellan or I must go, Mr. Stanton."

Stanton turned on him with a sneer. "What! Has the worm turned?"

"Come! Come, Stanton. Don't visit your impatience with me on poor Halleck. What have you got against my order?" Lincoln's voice was very kindly. He pitied Stanton for his bad nerves.

The Secretary jerked off his spectacles, jerked his head, brought his fist down on the desk where he was again standing, close to the President.

"That it's too late!"

"Then you would keep McClellan? You mean that, Stanton?" urged Lincoln gently. "I really don't think he's to be trusted!"

"Trusted!" shouted Stanton. "Trusted! Why, you simple fool—"

"Mr. Stanton, you forget yourself!" snapped John Hay, springing from the sofa, his black eyes blazing. "No, Mr. President, I will not be silenced," as Lincoln shook his head at him. "I have every respect for the ability and integrity of the Secretary of War. But I take this occasion solemnly to warn him that unless he ceases his attacks on the President, he will be known to history only for the virulent and impertinent epithets he applied to Abraham Lincoln."

Lincoln moved uncomfortably on his stool. Praise always embarrassed him. Hay and Stanton glared at each other, but before Lincoln could discover the tactful word he sought, the Secretary of War put his glasses back on his nose.

"Perhaps I deserve that, Hay," he said, quietly. Then, his voice rising, "But McClellan is a traitorous scoundrel. I hate his very gizzard. If the President had taken my advice six months ago—"

"How dare he take your advice as to persons, Mr. Stanton," asked John Hay, earnestly, "when your counsel is so frequently mixed with insuperable hatreds?"

Stanton sighed and turned to Lincoln. "I really am delighted, sir," he said, with the charm of voice and manner none knew better how to wield. "Tell me your further wishes."

"Better dictate a note to John Hay,—this thing must be kept secret,—to be sent with this order. And you, too, Halleck—" replied the President. "Cheer up, Halleck! You're better at writing than anything else. If I'd written your book on war, I'd have a real claim on fame!"

He spoke with a jocularity he was far from feeling, and paced the floor while the notes were dictated.

"By direction of the President of the United States, it is ordered that Major-General McClellan be relieved from the command of the Army of the Potomac, and that Major-General Burnside take command of that Army.

"By order of the Secretary of War."

Halleck bit his smooth-shaven lips; then, with an unusual note of firmness in his voice, he gave John Hay this dictation:

"General,—on receipt of the order of the President, sent herewith, you will immediately turn your command over to Major-General Burnside, and report to Trenton, New Jersey, reporting on your arrival at that place, by telegraph, for further orders. Halleck."

Stanton stared as he listened, and as the General-in-Chief finished, he shouted. "That's right! Exile him! Make the cut complete and final! That's where your military experience and knowledge come in, General."

"Yes," agreed Lincoln, who was very pale. "And now, whom shall we send with this?"

"General Buckingham," replied Halleck, promptly. "He's an older man, discreet and long-headed and very suave."

"Get him started, at once," directed the President, "and in this manner: He is to go first to Burnside, at Orleans. Burnside is going to be unhappy about this. He's devoted to McClellan and doesn't want this job. I wish myself there was some one better fitted for it. Your messenger must be smart enough to understand this feeling of Burnside's because he's got to persuade Burnside to go with him to McClellan, at Rectortown, or wherever he may be at that hour, and he must see Buckingham deliver the order to McClellan. Tell Buckingham to come to me as soon as he returns."

For the first time Stanton smiled. "I see! Very good! Anything else, Mr. Lincoln?"

"One thing more! How many men have we to-night in the defenses around Washington?"

"About 70,000, Mr. President," replied Halleck.

"Be prepared for McClellan's making a move against them, or for their joining him. He very likely may prepare to become dictator," said Lincoln, gravely.

There was a short silence broken by Halleck's, "Very well, sir."

Lincoln gathered up his gray shawl, took his cap from his pocket and nodded to John.

CHAPTER XXXI

THE KEYSTONE OF PUTTY

MARY was bonneted the next morning, and was wrapping her fur-lined mantua about her, when Lincoln came into the room.

"Tad told me you were going out for the day," he said, explaining his unwonted appearance at that hour, "and I want you not to go, Mary. I had a bad dream, last night. Some one was trying to strangle you. You were alone in a grove of trees, and, try as I would, I couldn't get to you. Mary, you stay right in the house, to-day, where I can get a glimpse of you whenever I want to."

Mary paused in the arrangement of the folds of the mantua over her arms, and stared at her husband. He was looking even more ghastly than usual. His lips trembled nervously.

"Abra'm, has something more than usual happened? Is a battle begun?"

"No! Yes! Mary." He put his hand on hers. "I've removed McClellan permanently."

"Thank God Almighty! Does McClellan know it, yet?" She dropped the cloak, and seized his hand in both of hers.

"He will know this afternoon."

"And you fear almost anything, both military and political! Oh, my dear, I'll not leave you, to-day!" Mary began to pull off her gloves.

"It's not that! I really had an ugly dream. I woke crying." He looked down into her blue eyes, wondering if it would ease the pain in his heart to tell her of all the black forebodings that had made the night horrible. But he dared not, he told himself, permit even a trickle to appear in the levee, lest the whole wall of his control give way. . . . "Mary, I loved McClellan," was what he finally brought forth.

"I know you did,—and so does he know it,—the priceless fool!"

Lincoln stooped and kissed her, then hurried back to his office.

Mary, with a little sigh for the adventure she was giving up, sent off a note to Miss Barton, advising her that she had not yet abandoned hope as regarded the tents, and excusing herself from taking the proposed ride in the ambulance. Then she settled to bandage making.

It was bitter November weather, with heavy clouds and snow flurries. Lincoln looked into the sitting room several times during the day, brightened at the smile Mary gave him and hurried back to his office. The weather, by six o'clock, was very bad, and visitors thinned out, correspondingly. And still no word from General Buckingham. Lincoln spent the evening with the Attorney General, going over soldiers' petitions for pardons and reprieves, as usual reducing poor Bates to despair over his leniency. Shortly before eleven, this task was completed, and Lincoln started for his room. He paused a moment at young Stoddard's desk.

"Working late, aren't you, Billy?"

"I've sworn I'll not leave this desk, sir, until I've finished these letters. They've been accumulating since September, from important people about the emancipation proclamation." The young man smiled and sighed at the same time.

"Better go to bed, my boy! This burning of the midnight oil fits us old fellows, not young ones who should be out courting pretty girls." He patted Stoddard's shoulder, and moved wearily on toward bed.

Gradually the White House settled to quiet, but as the hours wore on, Stoddard became aware that, above the ticking of the clock, there was another steady and monotonous sound, and told himself that the President was walking the floor again. At three o'clock, when Stoddard finished the last letter and started for home, the slow, even sound fell on his ears as he went softly down the staircase.

At five o'clock, there came the tinkling thud of a spurred boot in the hall outside Lincoln's room. He opened the door just as a knock sounded. An officer, wrapped in a snow-covered cape, saluted him.

"General Buckingham, Mr. President. I have just come in from Rectortown."

"Come in, General!" Lincoln closed the door, carefully. "Hang your cloak before the fire. Here, let me help you. You look very tired."

Buckingham, a man with fine, intelligent eyes, and a clean-cut nose above iron-gray whiskers, took the chair Lincoln indicated.

"It was an unsavory job, eh, Buckingham?" asked the President, dreading, yet impatient for what the general had to tell.

"Why, I never had a more difficult one, sir!" exclaimed Buckingham. "I delivered the order to Burnside, first. I never have seen a man so shocked. At first he could say nothing. Then he gathered himself together and said the order was a matter to which he would like to give thought, that he did not want the command. Then he called in two of his staff officers, and showed them the order. They were delighted at his promotion, and so expressed themselves. But for more than two hours he held out against them and me. He insisted that he was not competent to take so large a command; that

General McClellan was his intimate friend; that McClellan was better fitted than any one else in the Army of the Potomac to command it. But Burnside's is, essentially, a gentle nature. He yielded, at last, and we set out for Rectortown in a blinding snowstorm."

"You think Burnside weak, General?" asked Lincoln, uneasily.

"He hasn't a big fist," replied Buckingham. "I wouldn't say he was weak. We found McClellan writing letters in his tent, and I gave him the orders. He read them, then he looked at Burnside with a smile and said, 'I congratulate you, General!'

"'But I don't want the job,' Burnside said, 'I want you to keep it! Call your staff in, General!'

"McClellan kept on smiling and called in his officers. I don't know," hesitating, "whether he thought I was of no significance, or whether he wanted me to get an idea of what he meant to the Army of the Potomac. But, Mr. President, he allowed several of his officers to urge him, in my presence, to march on Washington and take over the Government."

Lincoln leaned forward, tensely.

"There were hours and hours of talk. They forgot their meals. They forgot their military duties. I swear to you, I didn't know what my move was, sir. I finally decided to sit tight, and wait for McClellan to declare himself. He sat hunched up at the table, biting his nails, long after every one had said his say. Finally, he got up and looked at me. 'General,' he said, 'go back and tell Lincoln I'll take his order.'

"Ah!" breathed Lincoln, almost groaning with relief. "Loyal at the last!"

"Perhaps!" said Buckingham, wearily. "More likely he was afraid. More likely it was just as impossible to his nature to move on Washington as on Richmond. Let history decide that. Certainly his contemporaries can't."

"General," Lincoln put his hand on the older man's knee with a sense of gratitude he found it difficult to express, "how can I repay you for the splendid chore you've done for us?"

"By letting me go home for a bath and sleep, sir!" with a twinkle in his eye that lighted a twinkle in the President's.

"Will you let me find a cup of coffee for you, first?"

Buckingham rose and drew on his cape. "I'd rather go home, thank you, Mr. Lincoln."

"All right, General. But you come back some day, and we'll take time off for a good talk. Come along. I'll let you out, myself." He led the weary general, however, not out to the north portico, but down through the kitchen, where the colored cook was just pouring out her pre-breakfast cup of coffee.

She was not at all confused by the arrival of the President, but grinned at him, affectionately. "Been up all night again, Massa Lincum, I suppose! Sally, bring cups for Massa Lincum and the gemmun."

"Sit down, General!" Lincoln pushed Buckingham into a chair by the fire, and himself passed him the steaming cup before he took his own. "These might seem like funeral baked meats to some," he said to his highly edified guest, "but to me it's a libation to dawn!"

Buckingham looked up with his fine, understanding gaze and lifted his cup toward Lincoln. They drank in silence. Having sped his guest, the President mounted the steps, two at a time, and bursting into Mary's room, roused her from sleep to impart the news to her. She listened, wide-eyed, then said, with extraordinary solemnity:

"Abra'm the war is won! You are in the saddle, at last!"

"I'm in the saddle and I'm going to ride just as soon as I find the stirrups," Lincoln said, carefully. "This is the crisis. If the peace party accepts McClellan's dismissal, however sullenly, it means that they will also accept the emancipation proclamation. I shall issue the edict of freedom January first, as I say I will in the proclamation. Then I shall *ride,* spurred boots in the stirrups. I must tell John Hay and George Nicolay."

Word of the dismissal spread over the country like wildfire. By night, the Cabinet table, Lincoln's own desk, Stoddard's desk were covered with messages from the public,—the bitter, vitriolic protests coming first, as usual. Lincoln worked with his secretaries, sorting and reading, struggling to feel the pulse of the country at the earliest possible moment. An unusual crowd of visitors thronged the halls. Mary finally established herself in the Blue Room, and gave tea and guarded information to the motley groups of women, who suddenly claimed acquaintanceship with her. Whether they admired or despised him, certainly McClellan had a greater hold on the imaginations of his fellow countrymen, at that moment, than any other person.

Toward the supper hour, a heavy sleet storm set in, and the women folk fled for their homes or hotels. By seven o'clock, Mary was alone with her empty tea tray. She had risen wearily to go upstairs, when a tall woman in black silk appeared in the doorway of the East Room. She wore a heavy mourning veil which concealed her face but Mary knew her, instantly.

"Good evening, Miss Ford," she said, coolly.

The Virginian flung back her veil, disclosing an olive tinted face distorted with something more than anger. To Mary she looked maniacal. Her eyes were half closed, her lips twisted to one side. She walked slowly across the room toward Mary.

"So," she said, her drawl never more pronounced, "you've had your way about McClellan, at last, you little cat!"

Mary reached toward the bell-rope, but with a sudden spring, Miss Ford placed herself before the handle. "I want only a few moments with you." She smiled crookedly. "I have just come from McClellan. I have just seen a man, a great man, contemplating the ruins of his life. I—"

Mary interrupted. She was recovering her poise. Surely, some one would come, at any moment. "No one knows better than you, Miss Ford, that McClellan is not great. Your choice of him was bad. A man small enough to be a tool cannot be big enough for greatness."

"You are learning to be sententious," sneered the Virginian. Then, leaning toward Mary until her twitching face was not two feet away, she said, "My house has been burned down. My niggers are gone. My father was shot as a spy, last week. All thanks to you and your 'intellectual giant.' Look at me, Madam! Half insane, am I not? Fit to destroy anything—hunted—desperate! Multiply me by a million, two million, ten million, and you have the South. Am I a toy? Am I to be ignored? Can you *proclaim* me out of the way? Can you abolish me with words—me and my million fellow devils?"

Mary, very deliberately, sat down and poured herself a cup of tea. She did not believe that the Virginian would lay hands on her, and she felt a sudden conviction that, given free scope, the frantic maker of plots would divulge some important facts.

"A good many people seemed to resent the proclamation," she remarked mildly. "What did you think of it?"

Miss Ford made a gesture of disgust. "Don't try to play with me, Mary Lincoln. You still fail to understand the depth of my desperation. I know Abraham Lincoln better than you do. I recognize the profundity of his political wisdom, as you cannot, because I am among those who have sought to frustrate him. More than that I love him,—yes, scowl with your doll face,—

I love him with a passion of which you are incapable. Therefore I read the handwriting on the wall as no other Southerner, and as few Northerners have read it.

"Listen to me and judge, if you can, my despair. When Lincoln removed George McClellan from the control of 300,000 men in the Army of the Potomac, he removed the only practical menace against the carrying out of the threat in the proclamation on January first. If Lincoln is still alive on January first to sign the final paper that frees the slaves, he will have broken the essential fighting superiority of the South, and the end is only a question of time. George McClellan was the keystone of the peace-with-slavery arch. Lincoln has pulled him down."

Mary, her heart beating heavily, supped her cold tea with a supercilious smile. "He was a pseudo-keystone. He was made of putty. That's where your judgment made its fatal error. Jeff Davis must be grateful to you."

"Yes, he's quite as grateful as you could wish. But I call your attention to the fact that your husband's judgment was almost as weak as mine. It's thanks to you that he came to his senses."

"You flatter me and contradict yourself," rejoined Mary, "having just spoken of his profound wisdom. May I ask why you are displaying the bad taste of telling me you are in love with my husband?"

"Because I know the thought will torment you when you realize how much more suited I am to be his mate than you!" The Virginian loosened the strings of her bonnet as though she found breathing difficult.

Mary laughed. "You poor, crazy thing!"

"Yes, crazy now, thanks to you!" declared Miss Ford, "but at my best, a year ago, the proper mate for him."

"I suppose it's this alleged love of yours that led you to send that fool of a Gordon to shoot the President, last summer!" Mary rose again, moving a little away from the menacing, dark face. "Well, you can't send him again, before January first, because he was killed at Antietam."

Miss Ford looked at her wonderingly. "Did some one shoot at Lincoln?—Gordon?—I warned Lincoln of that possibility. We did not use him for that—" She seemed to fall into a profound reverie.

Mary edged a little further away. "Well, Miss Ford, if I had your conviction of pre-knowledge, I'd go down South and tell my friends they might as well quit now."

"If you had my conviction," returned the Virginian, "you'd do as I do. Take you with me where neither of us can belong to Lincoln." She attempted to draw a small pistol from the reticule which hung on her left arm, but there was filigree mounting on the barrel which caught in the silk cords of the bag. Mary, who, for an instant, as she saw eternity opening before her, had seemed paralyzed, took advantage of the reprieve. She screamed, and with all her strength, thrust the tea table at the Virginian. It crashed into her, upsetting itself, and throwing Miss Ford backward against the wall. Then Mary fled.

At the door she ran into James and Taddie, followed by half a dozen, then a dozen strangers, part of the President's throng of visitors. She seized Taddie, gasping. "Take her—spy—armed— Don't let her get away!" Then she fled up the stairs, dragging the frightened child with her.

She burst into the President's office. Sumner was with him. "Miss Ford, downstairs, tried to shoot me. Send for Colonel Baker!" she panted, then sank into a chair and began to cry. Taddie, the moment she had freed his hand, ran into the hall. Lincoln and Sumner both hurried to Mary's side, but before they could more than begin to question her, Taddie ran in.

"They a' bwinging Miss Fo'd up stai's!"

A confusion of voices sounded in the hall. Lincoln, with a reassuring pat on his wife's shoulder, went into the reception room. Stoddard was trying to clear the crowd out. Miss Ford, her hands bound together with a handkerchief, stood calmly between James and old Daniel.

"Take her into my office," ordered the President. "Billy, get Baker over here. The rest of you gentlemen will kindly clear the room." He followed the crowd to the door, closed it and locked it after them, handing the key to Stoddard. Then he returned to his office, Taddie still at his side.

Mary was no longer weeping. She was standing before the grate, leaning on Charles Sumner's arm, and glaring at the Virginian, who was leaning against the Cabinet table, her eyes on the blazing fire. Sumner scowled when he observed Taddie who at once slid into an inconspicuous corner behind his father's desk.

Lincoln ran his fingers through his hair, took out the ivory paper knife, and otherwise prepared himself for what he felt would be one of the most distasteful scenes of his life.

"James, you needn't keep hold of Miss Ford's arm, I reckon," he suggested.

"I reckon if he does, there'll be a dead nigger in the White House before another dawn," drawled Miss Ford, without raising her eyes from her contemplation of the blaze.

" 'Scuse me, Mr. President." James did not stir. "I saw this lady trying to pull a pistol at the Madam. Guess maybe you didn't understand that."

"Let Senator Sumner take your place, James," ordered Lincoln.

"Senator Sumner must decline, sir." Sumner, very pale, his blue eyes full of pain, patted Mary's hand which quivered on his arm, and resolutely stared at the shadow in which Taddie was shivering.

Lincoln ran the paper knife through his hair. "Just what happened, wife?"

"I was alone in the Blue Room. Miss Ford came in through the East Room door. She seemed demented. She talked wildly for a few moments, then said she was going to shoot me and herself, and tried to draw a pistol from her reticule. It caught, and I pushed the tea table into her and ran. James and a crowd did the rest."

"What did you do, James?" questioned the President.

"I grasped the hand that had the pistol, Massa Lincum, sir, and some more gen'men tied her hands, and Daniel and me led her up here." James spoke firmly, but with an uneasy black eye on the Virginian.

"What on earth could you have against my wife, Miss Ford?" demanded the President, conscious of mounting fury, and determined not to show it.

"Many things, Abraham Lincoln, but chiefly that she is your wife," replied Miss Ford, suddenly lifting her violet eyes to rest on his. "I'd resent any one that has that position."

"Do send Tad out, Mrs. Lincoln," begged Charles Sumner.

Mary started. "Where is the child? Taddie!"

Taddie sidled up to his father. "You want me, don't you, Papa day?"

"Might as well let him stay. He's my shadow, I reckon," said Lincoln, looking at his wife.

"Taddie!" Mary spoke sharply, motioning toward the door.

The child hesitated, then he said, "Yes, I'll go motha'. I know Miss Fo'd's been naughty but don't you fo'get how good she was to Willie and me and how Willie loved he'. I do, too."

He ran across the room, clasped Miss Ford's two imprisoned hands in his, and kissed them. Then, with a child's peculiar dignity, he marched out of the room.

Lincoln looked after him with softened eyes. But his anger was not lessened by the little boy's lovely gesture. Miss Ford had not given Tad a glance.

"If you'd tried to shoot me, I could see your point, you being a Southerner," said Lincoln. "But when you attack my wife—I have no bowels of compassion."

The Virginian had not taken her eyes from his face. "Don't talk nonsense to me," she drawled. "I know how to value what you feel for your wife."

"Miss Ford!" ejaculated Sumner.

Apparently, she did not hear him.

Lincoln eyed her, thoughtfully. Then he looked at Sumner. "I think you'd better take Mrs. Lincoln into the sitting room, Charles. There's nothing for her in this nonsense."

"No, Mr. Lincoln," cried Mary, "I'm not going to move until I am assured that you won't hand this woman a pardon, as you do every one else."

Lincoln could feel himself flushing. Well, perhaps he deserved that. He was pretty soft about the soldiers. But Miss Ford! Her declaration of love made him sick at his stomach. His lower lip pressed firmly over his upper, he made no reply to Mary; only stood looking at her. She gave a little sob, and permitted Sumner to lead her away.

As the door of the private passage closed behind the two, Lincoln turned to Miss Ford. But before he could speak Colonel Baker burst in from the reception room. He was accompanied by a tall bearded sergeant of the detective police.

"My God, Mr. Lincoln!" he exclaimed. "I'm sorry and ashamed about this."

Lincoln nodded. "I want Miss Ford locked up in the Old Capitol Prison, Colonel. And I want her kept there until after January first. I'm going to hold you responsible if, in that time, she communicates with the outside world. After that date, if she has behaved herself, you are to send her down to Richmond with the understanding that, if we catch her about the Northern lines during the rest of the war, she shall have the usual fate of spies. Now, you can go through the motions of whatever you think is necessary to carry out my order. But that's to stand."

"I don't want your leniency, Abraham Lincoln!" cried Miss Ford, suddenly straining to free her hands from her bonds.

Lincoln motioned for Baker and his man to take over James' and Daniel's job.

As Baker deftly slipped handcuffs on her wrists, the Virginian gave a piercing scream that rang through the White House from attic to basement. But she did not resist as the men led her from the room.

Mary Lincoln was in a bad state of nerves. Lincoln went to her room as soon as he had disposed of Miss Ford. He found her in a violent hysterical attack, and sent at once for Dr. Stone and Lizzie Keckley. He held her in his arms until those two experts arrived, but the three were unable to quiet her, and at last the doctor was obliged to give her an opiate. Lizzie and the President sat by her bedside until midnight, then the dressmaker persuaded him to go to bed.

She wakened him at dawn, however. "The Madam's got something on her mind, sir. She's all worked up about it and I think you'd better come in, yourself."

"All right, Lizzie," replied Lincoln, pulling on the faithful and faded dressing gown and slippers.

Mary was sitting up among her pillows, wearily, like a child.

There was a good fire in the grate.

"Pull the big chair up close to the flames, Lizzie," ordered the President, "and we'll see if we can't comfort this girl. Put a shawl round her."

He lifted his wife in his arms, and seated himself in the big chair, while Lizzie wrapped the shawl over them both, then slipped from the room.

"Hush, darling Mary, while I tell you something. I sent Sister Ford off to the Old Capitol. Wasn't that sense enough?"

Mary nodded convulsively.

"You were badly frightened, I know. But can't you think of yourself as one of the soldier boys? What if each of them had hysterics every time a gun was pointed at them? You were brave as a lion, for a while. Can't you keep it up?"

"I'm—not—frightened!" gasped Mary. "It was—what—she said about you—and me!"

"Oh!" He patted her shoulder and stared into the fire. What had the Virginian said? She had insinuated something. A slur on his affection for Mary! Ah, yes! With sudden understanding came sudden sense of contrition. Perhaps there would never be a better time than now for clearing away the fog.

"Did she say more to you, in the Blue Room, than she did to me, in the office, dear Mary?" he asked. "Try as hard as you can, to stop the tears. Before long some one will burst in on us, and I want you to empty your heart to me. Whatever she said was lies, of course. I wanted to throw up my dinner when she spoke about her feeling for me."

A smile crossed poor Mary's swollen face. She was getting herself in hand again. After a moment, she began to speak coherently. And bit by bit, the story of the conversation in the Blue Room came out. Mary had a remarkable memory. The account, Lincoln knew, was complete and accurate. She finished with a sentence that moved her husband more than had her tears.

"Don't waste time trying to comfort me, Abra'm, but tell me the whole truth. Your kindly lies leave me utterly lonely."

The room was lighted only by the candle on the table and the flame from the grate. The uncertain glow was kind to Mary's face, and gave a depth to her eyes that was quite unfathomable. The two stared at each other, struggling, as have so many millions of men and women since humanity was achieved, to pass the impassable barrier of human personality.

"Miss Ford," began Lincoln, thoughtfully, "isn't to blame for all your tears. I reckon she was just the last straw. You've been hearing from all sides devilish things about what you mean to me."

"Taddie came in the other day," said Mary, "and asked me what it was for a lady to be a swear word. It turned out that he had heard some one say that I was a curse to my husband and my family."

Lincoln winced and groaned, then said, "Mary, I don't know what love is, do you? Is it limited to the kind of feeling young folks have when they are sparking? Or has it only to do with begetting? Or is it a never-ending need, one for the other? Isn't it each of these things, not all at once, but in inevitable sequence? Dear wife, can anything shake our knowledge that all these belong to our experience with each other? Mary, how can you let anything any one says enter that holy place of which only husband and wife—you and I—have knowledge?"

Mary drew a long breath. He lifted her hand to his lips, then put it down again.

"Let's lay this ghost, once for all, my darling girl. No one knows as I do how I neglect you and how that neglect feeds malicious tongues. But, Mary, I'm not big enough to carry the burden of this war, and have left time for the care and attention you ought to have. All that is left is the unending need for you and even for that I have scarcely strength to seek. I feel as a man must feel who is carrying a burden up hill, a burden so great that his knees and his will buckle under him at every step. He yearns for, he needs, he craves, the human tenderness he's entitled to but he cannot indulge and refresh himself in those. The burden requires all of him." He paused and the old Carcassone of his soul rose again. "Some day, precious Mary, when all of this war is over, you and I will go to the Holy Land and on around the world. And we'll have leisure to give each other."

"Abra'm! Abra'm! Why haven't you said this to me before?" cried Mary.

"I've wanted to," he said, huskily. "But you know me, Mary. I don't do the important things till circumstances force me. I reckon it requires a convulsion of nature to get me going."

Mary smiled a little. "I know. It needed the rebellion to make a real President of you."

"Yes, ma'am," he returned the smile, "and a Miss Ford, with a shooting iron, to make a real husband of me."

Mary laughed outright. "I doubt if even she could do that! But at least she's forced you to lay the ghost."

Lincoln gathered both her hands in his. "Have I done that, most dear wife?"

"Abra'm, I understand, at last. And nothing that any one can say or you can fail to do, will disturb me again." She laid her cheek to his and he held her close.

A rap sounded immediately and Lizzie came in with a breakfast tray.

"Lizzie," asked Mary, "this is so opportune I'm almost suspicious that you were listening at the keyhole!"

Lizzie threw up her brown chin indignantly, but there was a twinkle in her eye as she said, "You do me an injustice, Madam President!"

CHAPTER XXXII

FOREVER FREE

ELECTION day, as Nicolay observed to John Hay, was almost as much of a strain on the President as the day of the battle of Antietam had been.

Lincoln heard the remark and said, with a grim smile, "We're fighting a battle, more important than any in the war so far. If the fellows who say they won't back me in the proclamation and in removing McClellan, are numerous enough to control the State legislatures, Governors and Congressmen, the battle and the proclamation are lost."

And for many days after the returns came in, it did look as if the battle were lost. The number of Democrats in the House of Representatives was increased from forty-five to seventy-five and it looked as though Lincoln had lost the support of that great branch of the government. Huge Democratic gains, indeed, marked the elections in all the Middle West and they were overwhelming in New York State, where Seymour quite literally had fulfilled his prophecy and had placed New York in his pocket.

As soon as the Congress convened on December first, a bitter fight over the proclamation began. This was at its height, when General Burnside, suddenly bolting the plans of campaign which had been agreed upon by McClellan and the War Department, moved the Army of the Potomac against Fredericksburg. A battle was fought on December 13th,—a battle that once more was a ghastly defeat for the ill-starred Union forces. Lee's losses aggregated 4,200, Burnside's over 10,000.

Lincoln passed through the battle-day with his usual travail of spirit. Halleck, as he brought in person to the President the last returns, on the evening of the 14th was in a state of desperation. Lincoln read the figures.

"It looks bad," he said, slowly, "unless we use long-shot arithmetic. Lee had about 75,000 men and lost 4,200. We had about 200,000 men, and lost 10,000. If the same battle were to be fought over again, every day, through a week of days with the same relative results, Lee's army would be wiped out, and Burnside's still be a mighty host. I can't find a general who can face my arithmetic, but the end of the war will be at hand when I do find him. Perhaps Grant will develop that way."

"God forbid the carnage!" ejaculated Halleck.

"The quickest way to end the war, Halleck! Burnside is due to have an awful increase of desertions after this. You'd better go down there yourself, General. Go over the ground with him, and give Burnside some concrete suggestions. He's lost his grip."

"My going would be useless, sir. He disregards me."

"Nonsense!" irritably from the President. "He's the most honest, most reasonable man in the army."

"I know he is, Mr. Lincoln, but he's lost his grip, as you say." Halleck wiped his forehead with a sigh.

"And that's where your skill lies,—in helping him to get it back. Don't fail me, General, in the point precisely where I expect you to be of greatest assistance. Your great military skill is useless to me unless you can do this sort of thing for your generals in the field. Burnside is worth saving. He still, because of his superb character, has the confidence of the countrv. Now, you go out there in Virginia and save him."

Halleck made a despairing gesture. "I'd rather you'd accept my resignation, Mr. President."

"I don't want it. What would I do with the thing? Frame it? Go out there, Halleck, and uphold Burnside's faltering hands." He gave the discouraged General-in-Chief a smile and turned back to the war map. Halleck mumbled an apology and went out.

When he had gone Lincoln again picked up the figures on Fredericksburg and stared at them broodingly.

"It's what I asked for," he said aloud. "It's what I said was needed to make the North demand a greater reason for fighting. It's the lever needed to make Congress see that we've got to break the fighting superiority of the South by using the slaves, or lose this war— The Almighty must have heard my thoughts—and yet"—wringing his hands and groaning—"it doesn't seem as if I could stand another defeat and live. God will enable—God only can enable, if He will—*if* He will."

He sprang to his feet and rushed into Taddie's room, where he engaged in a game of bear-baiting, until Mary insisted upon putting the excited boy to bed.

She came into his office, afterward, accompanying James and the President's supper tray. She found that often she could snatch a moment with her husband in this manner when there had been no other free moment in the day.

She stood by his desk, watching him as he absently ate his soup. "Abra'm, shall you postpone issuing the edict of freedom on January first, as you announced in the proclamation?"

"Why should I?" asked Lincoln.

"Well," replied Mary, "unless things make a sudden change, it doesn't look as if the edict would have much force."

Lincoln sighed, but declared that nothing could change his purpose. Mary buttered a roll for him, and said, as she placed it in his hand, "Abra'm, Taddie wants to send a present to Miss Ford, for Christmas."

"They may not let her have it." Lincoln's mind reverted, with sudden pity, to the handsome, unhappy creature in a cell. "He'll have to talk it over with Baker."

"You don't object?" asked Mary.

"Of course not! Do you?" smiling at her.

"Yes, I do. But the child needn't be thwarted in a generous impulse for that reason. Anna, that colored maid of hers, is devoted to her, by the way. She told Lizzie Keckley that Miss Ford believes that Jinny made her way to Canada. Seems Miss Ford had sent Jinny to take a message to Gordon and she never came back!"

"Poor Jinny!" murmured Lincoln. "Baker, by the way, tells me some one of his woman prisoners in the Old Capitol is keeping Davis informed of my movements. He thinks it's Miss Ford, but he can't make the connection."

"Can't I tell Lizzie Keckley that?" asked Mary. "She might be able to pick something out of Anna where a white man, like Baker, couldn't."

"You're still after poor Sister Ford, eh?" asked Lincoln. "Well, I reckon you ought to help if you can, and Lizzie is mighty discreet."

There was silence again, broken by Mary asking softly, "Are you terribly discouraged, Abra'm, about the proclamation?"

"In a way, yes! I'm very anxious. So far its effect certainly has been bad. Stocks have declined, and troops are coming forward more slowly than ever. The attrition among the old troops is outnumbering the addition by the new. There is a lot of breath from the North about the proclamation, but breath alone kills no Rebels. Since McClellan was removed the morale of his army is very bad. And you know what the Congress is up to!"

"What are you going to do, Abra'm? I worry so!"

"Do? I'm going to bide my time and keep my faith in the goodness and commonsense of the average citizen.

In the long run, they are bound to support me and their will is what finally rules the world."

And with this statement, Mary was obliged to be satisfied, for Mr. Chase came in, obviously perturbed, and Lincoln set his mind to solving the difficulties that had caused a crisis between the Secretary of State and the Secretary of the Treasury.

Christmas came sorrowfully, for all save the children. Taddie had a glorious time with such an excess of toys that his mother was glad to see him in the basement sharing them with the members of his Company. In the afternoon, the President and Mrs. Lincoln held an informal reception in the Blue Room. There was no crowd, but such a continuous stream of callers that a lengthy talk with any one of them was difficult.

The stream was at its flood when John Hay, his eager face unusually eager, appeared with his arm through that of a bearded, carelessly dressed civilian in his early forties.

"This, Mr. President," cried John triumphantly, "is a friend whom you love but have not met! This is Walt Whitman!"

Lincoln felt his cheeks burn. "The prophet of democracy!" he exclaimed, seizing Whitman's horny palm in both his own, calloused as were the poet's. "How do you do, sir! What brings you to Washington?"

"I have a brother in a hospital here, Mr. President. He was wounded at Fredericksburg and I'm nursing him. I shall stay on and nurse others when he is better. A man is needed there."

"Good! Yes!" Lincoln put his shoulder against the pressing crowd, and clung to Whitman's hand, while he sought for some word that would express his gratitude to him. "Your 'Leaves of Grass,' Whitman,—I know it by heart—it has helped me."

A light as if he had suddenly been glorified leaped to the poet's eyes. "I have known you a long time, my Captain! I have learned the route you take when you get an afternoon drive, and I stand on the corner and watch for you—with your face of the master. The arms of all of us who understand are under you, lifting and sustaining you."

He spoke with such earnestness and simplicity that Lincoln felt a thrill of hope which sent the blood racing through his tired pulses. He leaned toward the poet.

"Are there enough who understand, Whitman, to save the proclamation?" he asked.

"Aye, more than enough! They are modest, slow to speak, but you will hear from all the brotherhood, the indissoluble brotherhood, before the new year comes."

The two men gave each other a long, unsmiling look, then the poet passed on. Lincoln drew a deep, life-giving breath, as though he had for a moment glimpsed final truth.

But even the memory of Whitman could not much lighten the suspense of the following week.

All his pleading, all his threats had so far not moved the slave States one inch toward taking advantage of the opportunity offered in the proclamation. To be sure, Missouri made pleasing gestures, and West Virginia joined the Union, a free State. But gratifying as this was, it could have little effect on the general situation. Since the removal of McClellan, and the consequent collapse of the peace party's hopes, a threatening silence had been the aspect presented by the British. Lincoln found this silence puzzling. Russell, at least, might have written, he thought.

But Russell had not forgotten. On the last day of December, when Lincoln was eagerly surveying the field for every shred of support to be found in every utterance from whatever source, a letter came from the war correspondent.

"I have good news for you," he wrote. "I have just learned that a paper in praise of the emancipation proclamation is being circulated among the cotton workers in factories here, and that already five thousand of these workers have signed it. The signing is continuing. There is no doubt that among the entire working class of England such a current of anti-slavery feeling is rising that Mr. Gladstone and Lord Russell are beginning to soften their cynical hostility to your great principle."

There was more in the letter, but this was the crux of it for Lincoln. He marked the paragraph, and, with a great sigh, handed the letter to Charles Sumner, who had been waiting while he read it.

"You see, Charles," said Lincoln, "while what I said in that proclamation didn't go well at first, it promises to wear well."

Sumner's smile had something of tenderness in it as he read the paragraph. "Yes, dear Mr. Lincoln, it promises to wear well! And I have further good word for you. This afternoon, by a test vote of 78 to 51 the House endorsed the proclamation!"

Lincoln could feel himself grow pale. "By jings, if nothing breaks between now and the first, I'll finish this job!"

"There's nothing left to happen, sir," smiled Sumner, serenely. "And once the edict of freedom is signed, you'll find a fairly solid North behind you. Though the South may hold out for more years than we can foresee, the day you sign the edict will see the turning-point of the war toward the North's inevitable victory."

Lincoln heaved a great sigh. "I haven't been out of the house for a week, Charles! Reckon now I can go get myself a little fresh air. Will you come along?"

"I'm sorry, Mr. President, but I must return to the Capitol. It's a glorious winter afternoon. Shall you take to the saddle?"

"Think I will, if I can duck Baker's cavalry." Lincoln smiled wryly.

A half hour later, Mary burst into the secretaries' room. She was as white as the little lace collar at her neck.

"Where's Mr. Lincoln?" she screamed.

Both young men came to their feet.

"He went for a ride across Long Bridge, I think," replied Nicolay. "What's the trouble, Mrs. Lincoln?"

Mary clutched her throat, and by an obvious physical effort forced herself to speak coherently.

"A plot to kidnap him before he signs the edict! Lizzie Keckley got it from Anna, Miss Ford's maid."

"They can't kidnap him when he's got a company of cavalry at his heels," exclaimed John Hay, ringing the bell violently nevertheless for Louis.

"Did the escort go with him?" cried Mary. "He's always evading them! I'll find out. I'll run to the stables."

Nicolay put his hand on her arm. "We must keep our heads, dear Mrs. Lincoln. The President mustn't come in and find us all drowning in a teapot tempest."

Louis came in at that moment and Hay sent him post-haste for Colonel Baker, then flew to get what information he could regarding Lincoln's movements. As Baker appeared,—Louis had caught him in the White House grounds,—John returned with word that Lincoln had gone out afoot and alone. Old Daniel had supposed that he had stepped over to Stanton's office. But Taddie had seen him heading across LaFayette Square and guessed that he'd be tramping out toward the Soldiers' Home.

Baker nodded coolly. "Why are you so uneasy, Mrs. Lincoln?"

"Lizzie Keckley just came into my room all out of breath," replied Mary, twisting her handkerchief, her eyes burning. "Anna had come to her, crying, as Lizzie sat down in our kitchen, eating her lunch. She'd just got wind of a plot, hatched by Miss Ford, Captain Taylor, and, Anna claimed, 'some big white folks' in Richmond, to kidnap Mr. Lincoln, take him South and hold him till he agrees, she said, not to sign up the niggers' freedom. They've been watching for a chance to get him alone. That's all I know. Quickly, Colonel Baker! Quickly or you'll be too late!"

"I thought I had impressed the President with just this danger!" exclaimed Baker, running from the room.

In the meantime, Lincoln had strolled out into the grounds drawing deep breaths of the brilliant afternoon air. He looked over his shoulders and grinned when he observed that he actually had eluded Baker's shadows.

"Reckon I'll go to a livery stable and hire a horse," he murmured, "and ride out to the Soldiers' Home. Not enough snow to matter out that road, and I'd like to see real country trees for a spell."

A flustered liveryman, half a mile out on F Street, supplied a roan saddle horse and Lincoln, still unshadowed, as far as he knew, started at a rapid trot upon the road which the last eighteen months had made so familiar to him. He was obliged to slow the roan's pace after a half hour's riding as the road, rising gradually above Rock Creek valley, was clogged with drifts. Before one of these Lincoln pulled up his horse, and sat in contented contemplation of the great blue shadows stretching across the snow-filled valley. The sky was flawless. A crow flew over the fields and dropped like a black plummet into the trees that lined the distant stream.

Nothing that had occurred during his administration had gratified Lincoln as had this act of the British workingmen. The warm glow that had filled his heart as he read Russell's letter he still felt and it lightened his burden by many pounds.

A sudden cold wind, rising from the valley, roused him from reverie. It was too late to continue the trip to the Home. He turned the roan's head cityward. As he did so, a man came out of the trees to the east of the road, a young man in fashionable riding clothes. He was limping and snow bedraggled.

Lincoln pulled up the roan. "Well, stranger!" he called, "Had a tumble?"

The young man answered breathlessly as if he had been running.

"Yes, sir! My horse bolted into the woods a mile below here, and I've only just got free from him. He threw me and now refuses to move. Are you a judge of horses, sir?"

"Roughly speaking, yes," replied Lincoln. "Is the animal down?"

"Not at all, sir! He stands gazing at the trees like an arborealist. I wonder, if you are returning to the city, if you could send another animal to me? I have twisted my ankle." The young man lifted an engaging dark face toward the President.

"He doesn't recognize me," thought Lincoln, enjoying the encounter. Then aloud, "I'll do more than that, mister. I'll go into the woods first and have a look at your balky friend."

"It's wretched going, sir." The stranger hesitated, then, as if his scruples were overcome by the kindliness in Lincoln's smile, he exclaimed, "Well, if you will be so kind! It's not more than five minutes' walk."

Lincoln pushed the reluctant roan after the young stranger.

There was little snow under the spruce and maples, but the ground was boggy and uneven. Lincoln pulled up his mount.

"I don't blame your horse, stranger," he called. "Not safe going in here for any animal. I reckon I won't be as much of a Samaritan as I intended, for I can't risk a fall. I'll go back to the city and send some one to you."

The young man turned and stood in the green dusk of the spruces with, it occurred to Lincoln, something extraordinarily eager and anxious in his gaze.

"It's only a step farther, sir," he urged, "and I'm in such haste to get back to the Capital!"

The President hesitated, his common sense and caution, struggling as usual with his kindness of impulse. And as he hesitated, Colonel Baker, on a dapple gray stallion, hurtled through the trees and brought up beside him.

"Get back into the road, Mr. Lincoln!" he ordered, covering the young man with his pistol as he spoke. "We've got the others, over in the swamp."

The President blinked, grunted and did not move. "What's the excitement about?" he demanded.

"Tell you later! Get back to the road, Mr. Lincoln, and tell Lieutenant Griffith it's all right. I'll follow as soon as I've handcuffed this lad."

"Looks as if I'd stepped into something," murmured Lincoln, obediently turning his horse.

The lieutenant with three other cavalrymen saluted him as the roan leaped the ditch into the road.

"Gave you the slip, didn't I, boys!" laughed the President.

"Only by a half hour, sir," replied the lieutenant.

"What's happened?" asked Lincoln.

"A plot to kidnap you, sir, to keep you from signing the edict of freedom. Mrs. Lincoln heard of it, and got it to Baker. We had no trouble trailing you, but it was pure luck that we pulled up when Colonel Baker saw you through the glasses, negotiating with young

Cromwell. We've been watching him for weeks. Think he is a messenger between the Old Capitol Prison and Richmond.

"I need a nurse, all right, Lieutenant," sighed Lincoln. "Here comes the rest of them," as a group of cavalrymen rode out of the roads into the red afterglow. "Who are the prisoners, Baker?" he added, as the Colonel rode up at the head of the troop and he caught a glimpse of several men in civilian clothes in their midst.

"Captain Taylor's one, and young Cromwell another," replied Baker. "I haven't identified the other four."

"Sure one of them isn't Miss Ford in disguise?" added Lincoln, smiling grimly, as he started the roan off beside the detective.

Baker returned the smile. "I'll bet my leg and arm she's inspired every one of these men to this job. If the Rebels hadn't got hold of two of my best women and would make reprisal on them, I'd accidentally hang Miss Ford! She's the most lucid crazy woman I ever knew. Can outwit any three men now. Lots more to be accomplished by kidnaping you, you know, than by assassinating you!"

Lincoln rode heavily beside the colonel, all the glow of the afternoon dead within him. All the superstition in his nature had been roused and he was suddenly filled with a conviction that, somehow, Miss Ford would prevent him from signing the edict. For a moment, he found himself wishing that she could meet the just fate of a spy. But only for a moment. Willie had died in her arms! Was there no appeal he could make to her—? Perhaps, if he could talk to her, once more—

He turned to Baker, dim in the winter starlight. "Colonel, I'd like a word with Miss Ford. Will you take me to her this evening?"

The colonel hesitated. "I hope you won't insist on that, sir. It will excite her terribly and no good can come of it."

The idea that, somehow, he could subdue her had now taken firm hold of Lincoln.

"I reckon you'll have to let me talk to her, Baker," he said.

"Very well, Mr. President," reluctantly, "to-morrow."

"To-morrow!" cried the President, impatiently. "By to-morrow she'll have poisoned me or kidnaped me. She's welcome to me, after I've signed up. But until then, I'm a precious cargo for the ship of State. I'll see her to-night before I go to bed."

Baker half groaned an uneasy, "Yes, Mr. President!" adding, "I'll have to examine these prisoners, then I'll come for you with what information I can of her share in this."

"I don't need the information, Baker. I *know*. The woman is my evil genius. I'm going to make her understand that her desires and those of the Almighty differ radically in this matter."

He felt as if some bitter shadow was engulfing him,—all the vicious forces of anti-slavery focused on him, he thought, through this woman. Every slaveholder in the South thinking of him with hatred, and hoping he would die before the dawn of the next day! He was glad to reach the White House and the sanctuary of the sitting room, glad to have Mary scold him and weep over him, fondle him and tuck him up on the sofa before the fire while she sat beside him, holding his hand and stroking his hair.

"What you ought to do to me is to stand me in the corner for an hour with a dunce-cap on," he said, as the bleak feeling in his heart eased a little.

"Dunce-cap!" exclaimed Mary, scornfully, as she kissed him. "I'd have used that long ago if I'd thought it would affect you!"

He lay for a short time, enjoying her ministrations, then rose and went to his office, where his draft of the edict of freedom awaited his final attention. He worked on this until supper time, and after the meal was finished, went at it again, copying and recopying it, changing a word here, the punctuation there, rearranging sentences, listening as he worked, for Baker's arrival.

At midnight, a messenger came from the Colonel, with a laconic note. Miss Ford had escaped from the Old Capitol Prison. Lincoln compressed his lips, and returned to his work on the edict. He made no comment when John Hay, looking in about one o'clock, remarked that there were enough detective police in the White House to fill the vacancies in the Army of the Potomac. About three, he took his Bible to bed with him. He slept uneasily, always with the vague consciousness of evil hopes and plans oppressing him.

The New Year's Day reception was scheduled to begin at eleven o'clock in the morning. Mary tearfully implored him not to attend it, but Lincoln by this time had achieved a fatalistic calm, quite different from his normal half-humorous self-possession, but none the less effective for that. Nothing, he reiterated to Mary, could change God Almighty's plans.

"He's going to let me sign this paper, Mary. What becomes of me after that needn't worry us. I don't imagine it worries Him! Let me see if I can't get the corrections done on it before I have to go down to the Blue Room. It could have a very bad effect on the country if I were to absent myself from an official reception as important as that."

He worked vigorously, revising the engrossed copy of the edict, until Mary, very handsome in a black grosgrain silk trimmed with beaded passementerie, came to fetch him.

For three hours, he shook hands with an unending, never-pausing stream of people. The line was showing no sign of attenuation, when, about two o'clock, Baker came up behind him and whispered in his ear:

"We've got her!"

With one great stride, Lincoln stepped back of the bank of ferns and fuchsias before which he had been established, carrying the detective police with him.

"Where is she, Colonel?"

"In the basement. She got a job as an extra nigger, a man waiter, for to-day. She cut her hair, blacked her face. I didn't recognize her myself till they washed her up." The usually cool and unemotional Baker wiped his dripping forehead. "Never put in such a night in my life! I absolutely knew we'd find her in this building."

"So did I!" nodded Lincoln. "Let me see her now, Baker."

The detective looked up into Lincoln's face. "Not necessary, sir. She's dead!"

"Dead!" gasped the President. "Who slipped on that, Colonel?"

"She did herself," replied Baker, drily. "Her disguise was so good that one of the nigger wenches in the kitchen tried to kiss her. For the first time, Miss Ford broke through her part. She slapped the wench and there was a mix-up during which Miss Ford received a knife in her back. It wasn't till then my men came to! Sometimes," with bitter sincerity, "I wonder why a detective thinks he has any chance beating fate."

"I want to see her, Baker," insisted Lincoln.

"Very well, sir, that can be managed. We'll work back through the state dining room." He led the way down the servants' staircase crowded with hurrying waiters, through the kitchen where great kettles of coffee steamed to the low ceiling, through the sculleries where half a dozen black wenches slopped cups and spoons about in tubs of water, to the woodshed, where was the clean smell of chips and kindling.

Near the open doors, through which one saw the wintry kitchen garden, the seedling table had been dragged and on it under a red checked kitchen tablecloth lay the unmistakable outline of death. A uniformed guard moved out into the areaway, at a nod from Baker, leaving the President and the Colonel alone. Lincoln turned the covering back.

The dye had disappeared and the short hair that clustered round her face was chestnut again. She was curiously unchanged, her beauty unmarred.

The President, arms folded on his breast, stared down at her. She had been removed, his evil genius! How unutterably just were the methods of Heaven, which had permitted her own desperate antipathies and desires to bring her to her end! And yet, had it not been for the blight of slavery, how lovely, what a supreme work of the Creator, she would have been. Lincoln felt his eyes sting and there were tears on his cheeks when he turned to Baker.

"My children loved her. Willie died in her arms. Baker, I want you to get her a decent coffin at my expense, and see that she gets buried out on her plantation where the rest of her folks lie. Will you do that for me, Colonel?"

"Yes, sir! I'm glad to," replied Baker, promptly. "She was the cleverest spy I ever ran up against and I'd just as soon show my respect for her ability as not."

Lincoln lifted the tablecloth back over the face.

He did not return to the Blue Room but went up to his office. He closed the door behind him and stood looking about him. He had the feeling of one who after a tremendous and dangerous journey, has reached his goal. The details of his office, for so many months unheeded, suddenly appealed to him as curiously pleasant. A rich coal fire crackled in the grate, casting a red glow on the scarred oak Cabinet table and on the two dogs, Sumter and Pensacola, sleeping before it. Snowflakes drifted thickly past the window and their hush was no deeper than the sudden peace that lay on his heart. He was to be permitted to achieve the great beneficence. Now, Lord, let Thy servant depart in peace.

There were a dozen people in the room who had risen at his entrance; members of his Cabinet, his young secretaries, Mary and Taddie. He smiled at them and moved toward the edict, which lay at one end of the Cabinet table. He rubbed his right hand vigorously.

"These fingers are almost useless from handshaking," he said. "Mustn't let my hand seem not to be firm when I do this job."

He sat down slowly and read several paragraphs aloud wondering if they were as nearly perfect as he could make them. He was not completely satisfied but at the moment could think of nothing more to add or subtract:

". . . I do order and declare that all persons held as slaves within said designated States, and parts of States, are, and henceforward shall be free; and that the Executive government of the United States, including the military and naval authorities thereof, will recognize and maintain the freedom of said persons. . . . And upon this act, sincerely believed to be an act of justice, warranted by the Constitution, upon military necessity, I invoke the considerate judgment of mankind, and the gracious favor of Almighty God.

"In witness whereof, I have hereunto set my hand and caused the seal of the United States to be affixed."

He lifted his pen.

"Let me hold the ink bottle, Papa day!" cried Taddie. "Let me!"

The little fellow eagerly lifted the ink from his father's desk and held it while Lincoln dipped in the pen and wrote, firmly,

"Done at the city of Washington, this first day of January, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and sixty-three, and of the Independence of the United States of America the eighty-seventh.

"ABRAHAM LINCOLN."

BOOKS CONSULTED

For seven years I have been reading the innumerable books relating to Abraham Lincoln. After a thorough weeding out, I selected the following as the most helpful for reference in writing a novel covering only two years of Lincoln's life. Many are out of print, but I finally ran them down and for three years, while writing the novel, had constant access to them. Especially in the diaries of Cabinet members did I find invaluable sidelights on the everyday Lincoln.

H. W. M.

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